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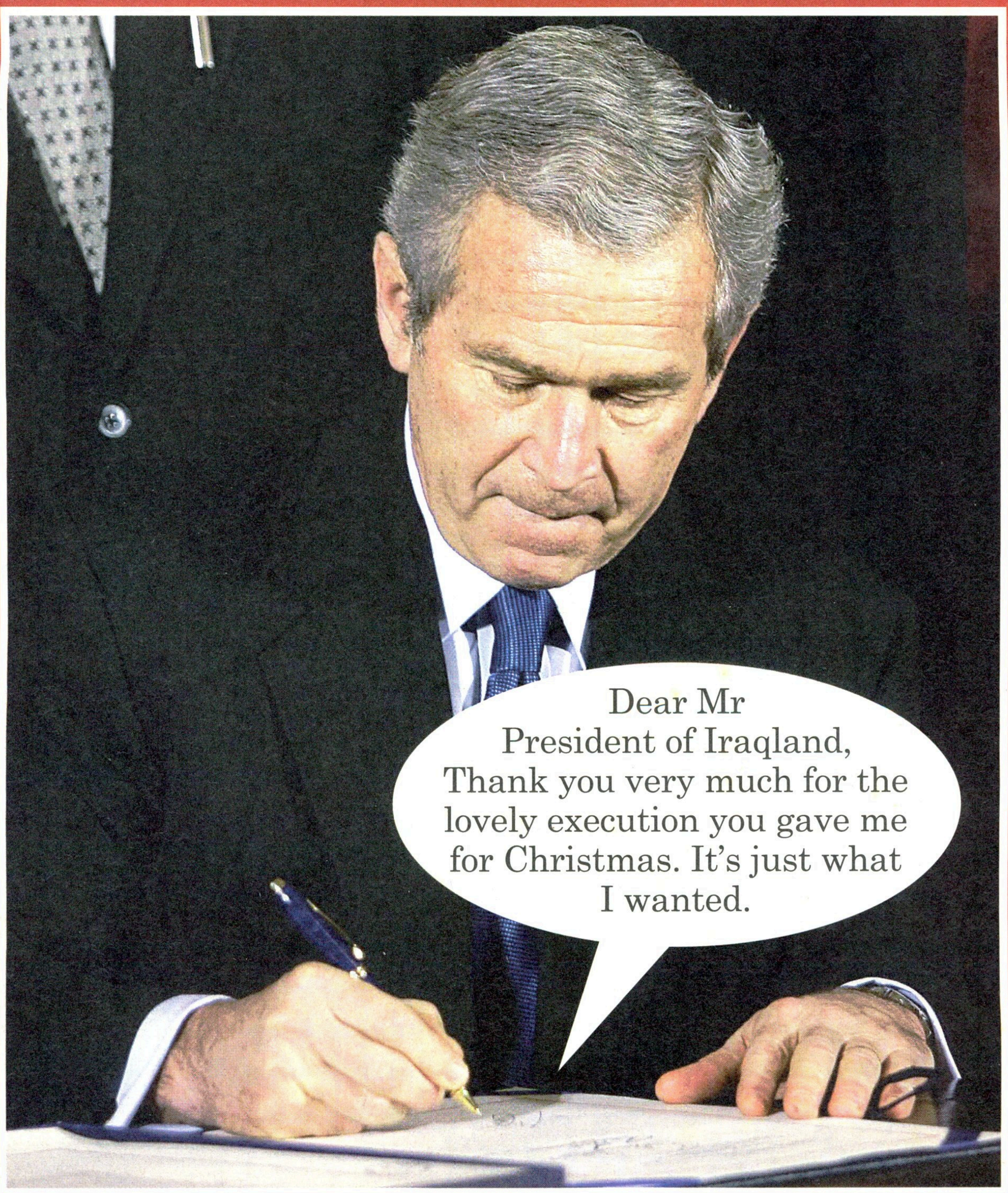
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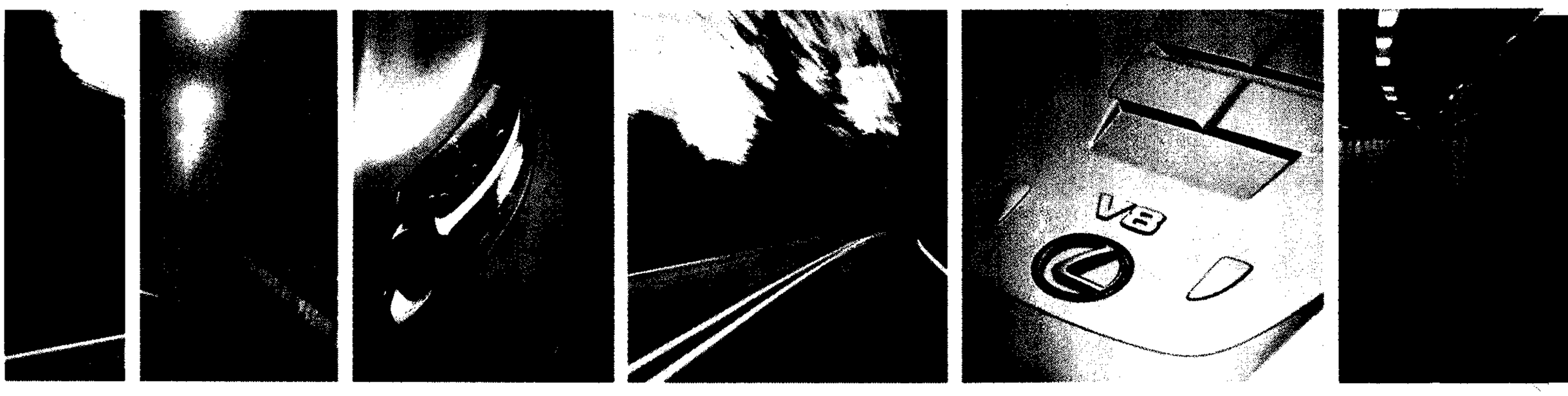

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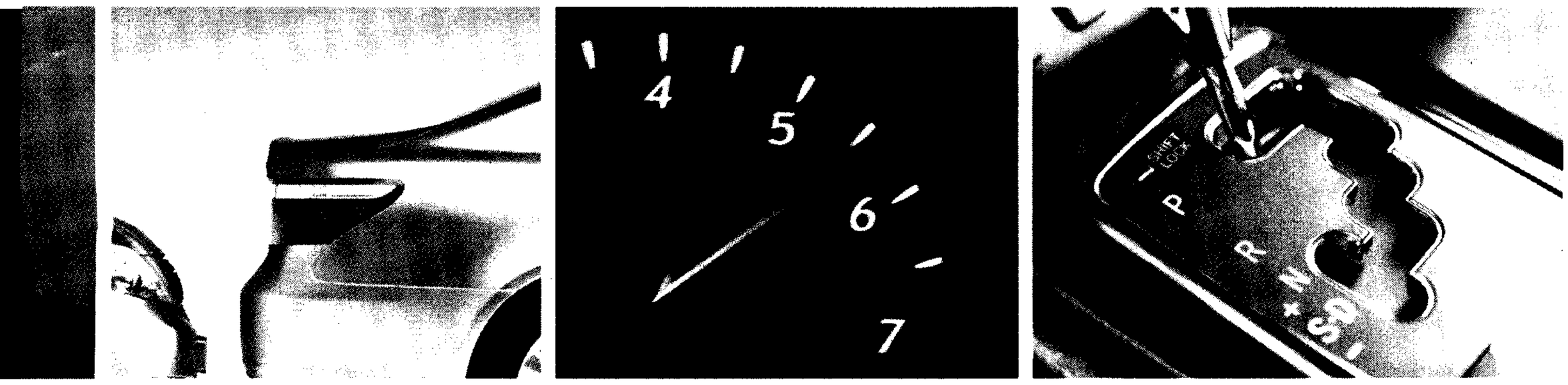

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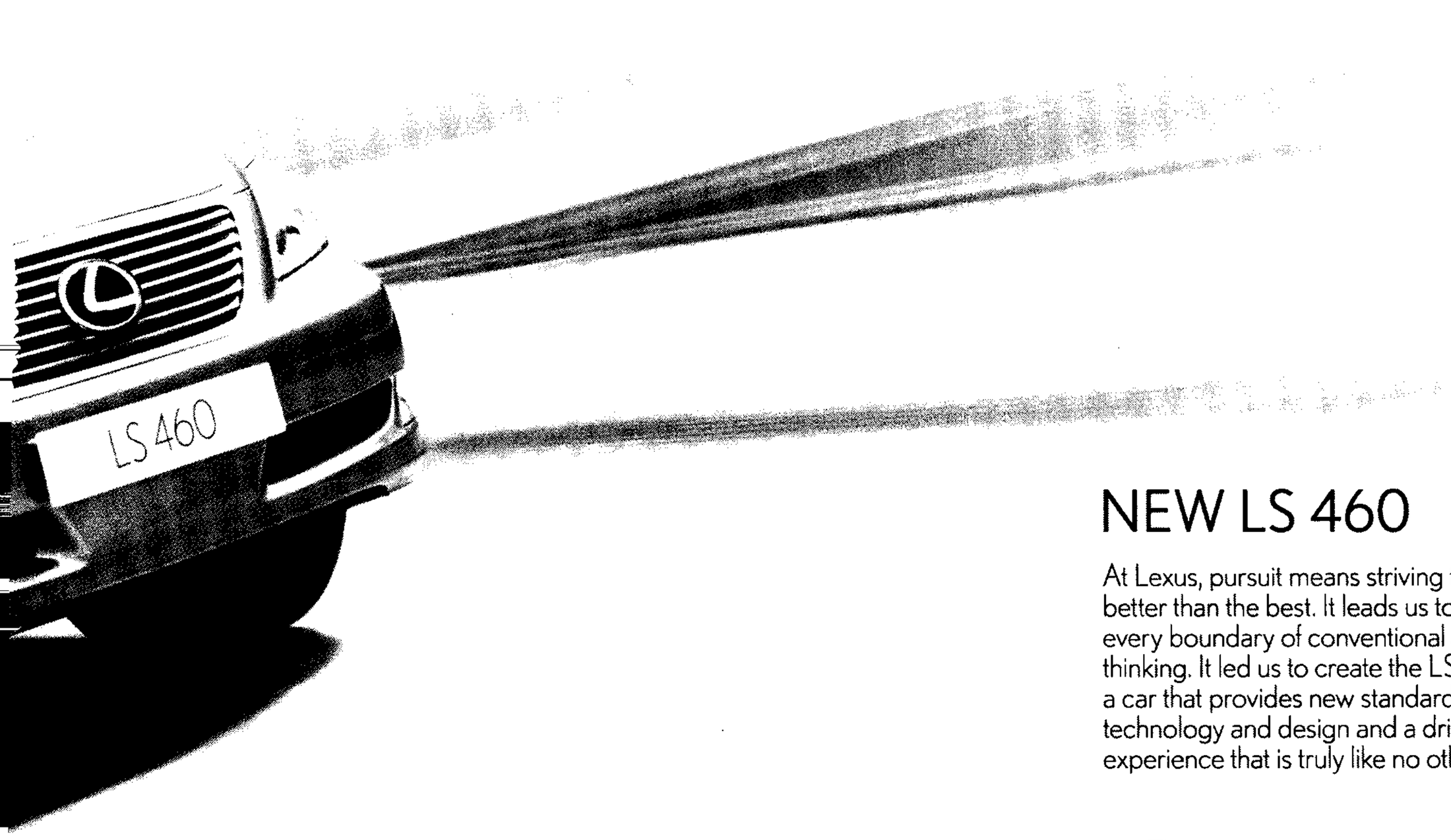

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"It's a shame he's dead – he would really have enjoyed it"

NEW YEAR'S HONOURS

Toning It Down

■HARD on the heels of the cash-for-honours scandal and in the week of Tony Blair's freebie with a Bee Gee, honours for Tony's cronies were strictly rationed. Most, in any case, will be happy enough to wait for Blair's resignation honours list in the summer.

While **John "Captain" Scarlett**, editor of the Iraq "dodgy dossier" got knighted, so did some critics of Blair's performance in the war on terror, such as solicitor **Geoffrey Bindman** and outgoing UN deputy secretary general **Mark Malloch Brown.**

Victor Bulmer-Thomas, head of the foreign affairs think-tank Chatham House, who described the Iraq adventure as a "terrible mistake" and derided the prime minister's "inability to influence the Bush administration in any significant way" got a CMG.

Unusually, no honours above an MBE were given "for services to the defence industry". The changing perception of what constitutes public service these days was reflected in the citation for "services to the gambling industry" as **John Kelly**, head of casino operator Gala Group, got an OBE.

Friends of Gordon

■MANY recipients of honours had a Brown-ish tinge. The knighthood for **Mike Rake**, £2.5m a year polo-playing head of KPMG and a regular business-breakfast partner of Gordon Brown, showed the government has lost none of its ardour for PFI-friendly accountants. In recent years the firm has paid record fines in the US for selling fraudulent tax schemes. In the UK Rake launched corporate responsibility initiatives to present a clean image.

Meanwhile **Jon Symonds**, finance director of another tax avoider, drugs company AstraZeneca, and leading adviser to HMRC on business tax, picks up a CBE. A CBE, too, for British Venture Capital Association chief **John Mackie,** reflecting his successful campaign to persuade the Chancellor to give tax breaks to finance firms. Mackie has now joined Kleinwort Benson, a bank with good links to the Brownites.

Brown-friendly businessman **Philip Hampton**, the £398,000 a year chairman of Sainsburys was knighted. When Hampton carried out a review of company regulation for Gordon Brown he concluded there should be fewer safety inspections, focussing on "high risk sectors". Supermarkets are not normally seen as danger zones – although in 1998 Sainsburys was fined £425,000 after a warehouse worker was crushed to death. The judge said the firm's procedures belonged to "the dark ages of work safety". Hampton was the finance director of Transco in the late 1990s when a judge found it had refused to spend money on repairing damaged pipes, causing the death of a family of four in a gas explosion, for which it was fined a record £15m in 2005.

Business as usual

■**STEF STEFANOU**, managing director of construction company John Doyle, was one of the business leaders who wrote to the *Financial Times* backing Tony Blair in 2005. He has given £33,000 to Labour since 2003. Stefanou was awarded an OBE "for services to the construction industry". This year John Doyle were fined £250,000 after a foreman was crushed by falling wood on one of their sites.

The OBE for outgoing head of the Institute of Directors **Christopher Beale** cannot have been hindered by his announcement that the Blair government is "business friendly" and the rapprochement between this formerly fiercely anti-Labour business body and Number 10.

The big consultants don't miss out. **Larry Hirst**, head of IBM (UK), the largest supplier of consultancy services to the government, picks up a CBE to go with the billions of taxpayers' money lavished on his company.

Rewards for failure

■BAGLESS vacuum cleaner tycoon **James Dyson**'s knighthood angered the unions, coming so soon after he had exported all his vacuum cleaner jobs abroad. Nor are they too chuffed about the "services to public transport" OBE for **Rodney Dickinson**, a director of bus and train firm First Group, which caused bus drivers in Leeds to strike over the firm's plans to slash their pensions.

The most glaring reward for failure was the OBE for former chief executive of the Atomic Energy Authority, **Dipesh Shah**, who resigned from the nuclear site operator after the Health and Safety Executive described his behaviour as "clearly unacceptable" (*Eye* 1163). Shah had attempted to poach key safety staff for a privatised firm to run the notorious Dounreay site in Scotland without consulting the regulator.

Bernard Herdan, boss of the Identity and Passport Service, became a "Companion of the Bath" [CB] to bolster him for the possibly rocky introduction of the ID card. Hopefully he will have better luck than with the miserable launch of the Criminal Records Bureau, which he also managed.

A CBE goes to **David Simons**, chairman of the Barclay brothers-owned Littlewoods group, for "services to retail". On Simons' watch the company has laid off thousands of staff, been highly criticised for withdrawing from the ethical trading initiative and been fined £5m by the Office of Fair Trading for price-fixing on children's toys.

In local government, an MBE went to **Alex King**, deputy leader of Kent county council, who as cabinet member for regeneration put £100,000 of taxpayers' money into the "low cost" airline EUjet, against the advice of council officers. EUjet promptly went bust.

Number crunchings

150 ■ Iraqi citizens killed at Dujail, for which Saddam Hussein was executed

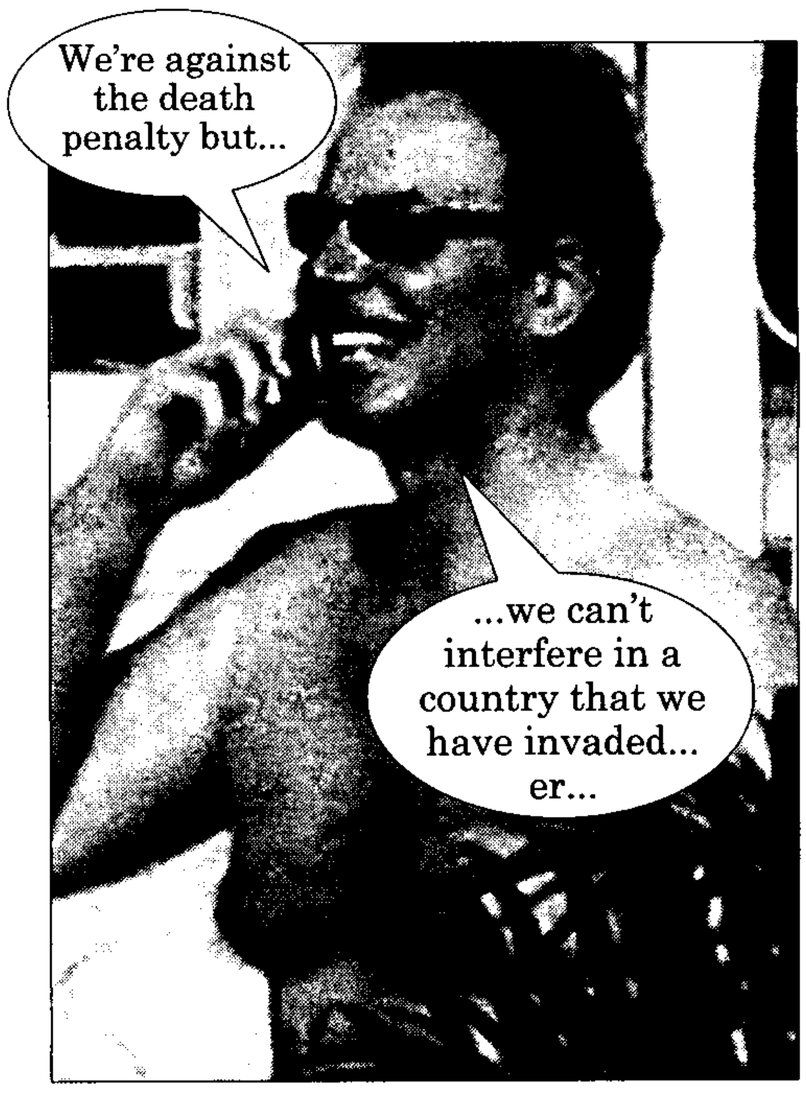
150,000 ■ Iraqi citizens killed since the invasion in 2003

MINISTERS are already finding out just how foolish they look in the wake of the government's decision not to investigate BAE over possible kickbacks to its client Saudi Arabia.

First up is development secretary and Labour deputy leadership candidate Hilary Benn, who issued a press release in December just five days before Lord Goldsmith's announcement, declaring himself the "ministerial champion for tackling overseas corruption". Benn went on to state his support for a UN anti-corruption meeting in Jordan and declared that "tackling corruption wherever we find it – whether here or abroad – is essential. We will not tolerate those who extort, corrupt and deceive. Together we can make progress… strengthening the institutions of government, promoting better transparency and accountability," and so on. Foreign Office minister Ian McCartney joined Benn to praise "anti-corruption day" and rally "governments serious about fighting corruption".

Unless, of course, British jobs or contracts are at stake, in which case the Serious Farce Office will be rapidly redeployed elsewhere.

● See In The City, p30/31



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ABC

Street Of Shame

"ONE of Britain's great unsung heroes." Thus began a full-page tribute to Paul "Loonybins" Johnson in the *Daily Mail* just before Christmas, as he prepared to receive a personal medal from George W. Bush at the White House.

Loonybins was not only a "historian of genius" but a "great British journalist", raved Sarah Sands.

Which must have jogged a few memories among readers. Didn't this Johnson chap used to produce thunderous why-oh-why pieces for the *Mail* several times a week? Why isn't he still writing them?

Alas, the paper had no space to recall the momentous events of 1998, when Johnson's long-standing mistress Gloria Stewart revealed all about their spanking sessions – complete with tape recordings. (Gloria: "You've been a naughty boy and you haven't been punished enough, have you?" Paul: "No, no, not yet!") Until then, Johnson had for many years sermonised on the *Mail*'s leader-page about the sanctity of marriage, the wickedness of adulterers and so forth. After this shaming degringolade, puritanical editor Paul Dacre told him that no further moral lectures were required.

HATS OFF to the *Daily Mail* who nearly ten years ago solemnly pledged to ban all paparazzi photographs from its pages, though this must be confusing for its readers.

In the week before Christmas they were treated to pictures demonstrating that Philip Green is "happy" to wear swimming shorts while on the beach, that Simon Cowell may or may not have had his chest waxed while Michael Winner definitely has not and that Trevor Eve has lost some weight, all courtesy of photo agencies Matrix, Big Pictures and Cruise!

"THANKS to some truly original thinking – on subjects as diverse as the web and global warming – mankind stands on a glorious threshold," announced the excitable sage Will Hutton in his traditional New Year message for the *Observer*.

"Immortality is on its way," he raved. "Ultimately, a chip in our brain will connect us in real time to the entire web." Had the column been written in a fit of festive exuberance after the office party? The suspicion was strengthened by his claim that "Moore's law (named after George Moore, co-founder of Intel) predicts that computing power will double every year". George Moore was a Cambridge philosopher. Moore's law was propounded by Gordon Moore.

Worse befuddlement set in when Hutton applied his mighty brain to global warming. "Campaigners have been doughtily insisting for decades that the explosion of carbon particles in the atmosphere is associated with a rise in temperatures." Er, not quite. Carbon particles are soot – which, like volcanic ash, in large quantities produces global dimming and lowers surface temperatures. The gas linked to global warming is carbon dioxide.

Still, at least he didn't blame it on carbon paper.

MICHAEL ATHERTON launched a scathing attack on ghost-written sports columns in last weekend's *Sunday Telegraph*.

"Serious-minded newspapers should be encouraged to put an end to such nonsense and stop defrauding the public," he declared. "At the very least, they should differentiate between those who write and those who don't by putting at the bottom on the player's column 'was talking to'…"

Atherton, who writes all his own articles, was referring to the recent blizzard of ghosted pieces by England's test cricketers. But might he also have been thinking of his *Telegraph* colleagues Gary Lineker and Alan Hansen – both of whom are paid vast fees for their less-than-riveting columns but rely entirely on ghosts to produce the words?

SCOOPS OF THE YEAR

THERE'S no such thing as a holiday for those hacks who slaved away over the festive season to bring their readers the latest news and exclusives. Here is a selection of their finest work:

● "KATE MOSS and junkie Pete Doherty were 'married' yesterday," the *Sun* revealed on Tuesday, claiming that the lovebirds had a Buddhist wedding at a villa in Phuket. No pictures of the ceremony were available, but there were at least photos to prove that potty Pete was indeed in Thailand.

Which must have surprised *Sun* showbiz editor Victoria Newton, who a mere four days earlier had published her expert assessment of rumours that Pete would join Kate in Phuket over New Year. "I doubt Pete will make it to Thailand," she concluded.

But then they're easily surprised down at Wapping, where on 19 December the *Sun* shrieked "Exclusive!" over news that "BMI airlines have banned staff from carrying Bibles into Saudi Arabia in case they offend Muslims".

Undeterred by objections from the airline that it is actually Saudi law that bans the possession of any religious books other than the Koran, the *Times*, *Telegraph,* and *Daily Mail* enthusiastically followed up the story the next day – a mere 11 months after the *Sunday Mirror* reported the ban (beneath a rather more convincing "exclusive" banner) on 8 January 2006.

Galley slaves at the *Daily Mirror*, of course, never rest in their efforts to find a good story – which is perhaps why they were so forgetful as to run "news" on 27 December 2006 that the shy and retiring singer Beyonce Knowles transforms into a wild alter ego called Sasha to perform on stage. Alas, the story first ran in the *Sun* in September 2003, from where it was picked up by ever watchful hacks at the *Daily Star* only five months later, by the *Sunday Times* the following month, the *Observer* in May 2005 and the *People* in November 2006. Well done everyone!

● FOUR days after apologising unreservedly for the phone-tapping activities of his royal editor, Clive Goodman, *News of the World* editor Andy Coulson demonstrated the brilliance his paper can achieve without the pin-numbers of celebrities' voicemails.

The front-page splash revealed that Italian professor Mario Scaramella, who dined with Russian spy Alexander Litvinenko on the day he was poisoned, was a "dead man walking" after medical tests had revealed "his major organs could soon begin to collapse and he could face the same lingering death as his pal". And the sports team pulled in a similar stonker for the back page: "Liverpool are close to agreeing a £450m takeover deal with the former owner of the Harlem Globetrotters. I can reveal billionaire George Gillett is set to pip Sheikh Mohammed's Dubai International Capital in the chase to own the Kop," boasted hack and Rob Shepherd.

That very afternoon doctors at University College Hospital announced that Scaramella was suffering "no ill-effects from radiation poisoning". He was discharged two days later, by which time Liverpool FC had confirmed that they had opened their books to Dubai International Capital in preparation for a buy-out by Sheikh Mohammed.

● "REMEMBER, you read it here first!" boasted the *Daily Express*'s Day & Night gossip column on 1 January. "Here is a selection of the exclusives that have made Day&Night the envy of our so-called rivals in 2006."

And how! "We revealed former Blue Peter presenter Mark Curry has started an online dating agency… We revealed Hinge - of ivorytinkling spinsters Hinge and Bracket - has opened a B&B in France… Annabel Giles, former wife of pop star Midge Ure, said her relationship with live-in boyfriend, businessman Hugo Brooks, had ended." Dwarfing all these, however, and in top position as the column's scoop of the year was the news that "a West End musical is planned on the life of Sixties singing megastar Kathy Kirby". Would that be the same life story on which Richard Desmond, proprietor of the *Express*, splashed his cash this year in the hope that it would contain revelations about the chanteuse's relations, the Rothermere family, owners of rivals the *Daily Mail*, and insisted his hacks plug at every possible opportunity this year? Yes, it would. And no, it didn't.

"BOASTS about 'inward investment' to Britain are often just a sign on the borders saying Britain for Sale, in ways that amaze other countries," observed Polly Toynbee in her *Guardian* column on 29 December.

"Water, gas, airports and other essentials are up for grabs to asset-strippers who borrow to tear companies apart regardless of anything but vast profits for the fixers," she went on.

Would that include boasts like the following? "The latest UN figures for inward investment show that last year the UK attracted more inward investment than any other country. It was twice as high as America's, growing by 183 percent last year... Here is more good news for the CBI to stick in its pipe." Says who? One Polly Toynbee, in her *Guardian* column on October 13.

THAT soft-hearted scrivener Ephraim Hardcastle of the *Daily Mail* rebukes the *Grauniad* for portraying the late Marmaduke Hussey as a Wodehousean booby who was a disastrous chairman of the BBC. "Unnecessarily venomous," Ephraim complains.

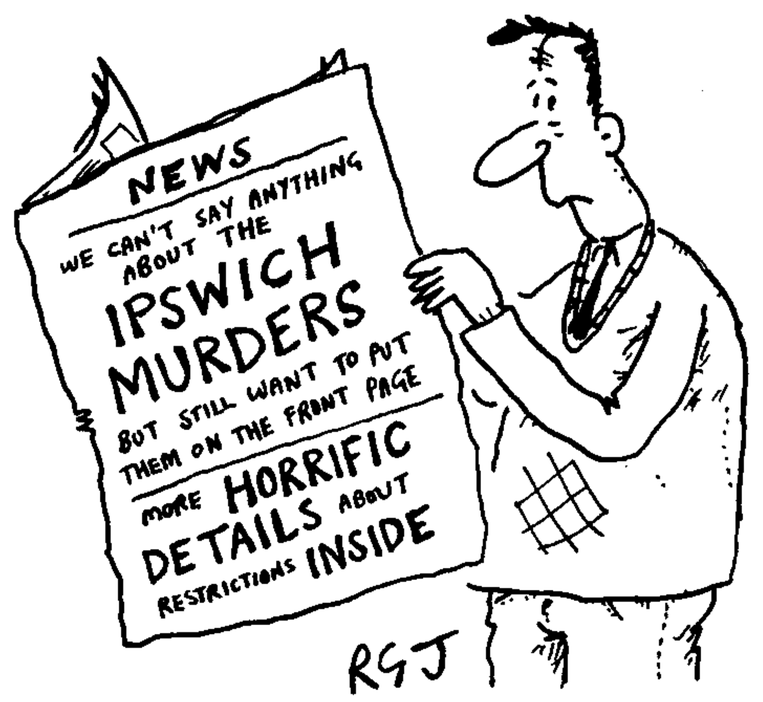
If only the *Grauniad* had followed the example of the *Daily Mail*, as in this comment from November 2001: "Former BBC chairman Lord Hussey told Libby Purves on Radio 4 yesterday that he rather regretted not having tried cannabis. Considering the balls-up Duke Hussey made of the BBC job without the benefit of mind-altering drugs, would we have a state broadcasting system at all if the old booby had tried wacky baccy?"

The author was of course Ephraim Hardcastle, aka Peter McHackey.

JUST FANCY THAT!

"A columnist in *G2* on December 14 ('The Ipswich killings have exposed attitudes to prostitutes that haven't progressed in centuries') discovered, among other terms of reference in the British press, 'girls', 'vice girls', 'hookers' and 'tarts'." – Readers' editor Ian Mayes, *Grauniad*, 18 December.

One across: Tart (8) Answer: Strumpet – *Grauniad* Quick Crossword, 15 December.



BACK in September the *Evening Standard*'s arts supremo Norman Lebrecht marked the 60th anniversary of the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra with a scathing attack.

It was "an event celebrated by few but itself"; chief conductor Daniele Gatti was the "rarely sighted Italian"; "this could have been any ensemble of modest accomplishment from here to Adelaide". Lebrecht concluded that "If [the RPO] were to vanish overnight, it would … leave no ripple on the public pond."

Others were more generous. The under-funded RPO "seems to be beating the odds once again" said the *Independent*. Under Gatti, said the *Times*, "they can easily compete with their London competitors". And a *Guardian* leader praised the RPO's "fine performers who keep music alive for millions".

Lebrecht's vitriol can have nothing to do with his paper's close association with the RPO's rival, the London Symphony Orchestra (LSO). When the LSO celebrated its centenary in 2003, the *Standard* was pleased to become its "official media partner" and promised to "highlight this *relationship to its readers* … in its outstanding coverage of the arts and in exclusive reader events and promotions". Lebrecht wrote: "The *Standard* is proud to be a partner in the Centenary Season of London's oldest and most enterprising orchestra."

After complaining to the *Standard* about the imbalance in coverage, former RPO violinist Gil Sharp, who retired last year, has had a reply from Lebrecht. He claims that, over the years, "I did not hesitate to criticise the LSO and various of its artists with as much vigour as I did the RPO."

Ms Sharp has looked up all Lebrecht's *Standard* cuttings mentioning the LSO. Apart from a bitchy attack on gorgeous, pouting violinist Anne-Sophie Mutter, which claimed she was paid too much, in more than 30 Lebrecht pieces Ms Sharp found not one that contained what could be remotely described as "vigorous criticism" of the LSO. Surely not?

RYAN IRE

EGG-ON-FACE time for Michael O'Leary, owner of low-cost airline Ryanair, who has lost his long-running battle to prevent disgruntled passengers sharing their stories online (*Eyes passim*).

O'Leary's ire was aroused when former Ryanair passenger Michael Coulston set up a critical website, www.ryanair.org.uk, after his baggage was sent to the wrong destination.

Ryanair, notoriously difficult to complain to if your flight is cancelled or your baggage goes missing, nearly succeeded in getting the site closed in 2005 (*Eye* 1124). Internet service provider ClaraNet cravenly took it down after pressure from Ryanair, but an ISP in Canada put it back up.

The site was set up by Coulston, a charity worker from Lewisham, in 2004 after his Italian holiday was ruined when Ryanair lost his luggage and left him stranded at Ancona airport with only the clothes he stood up in. The airline then charged him £160 to fly back to the UK and only refunded that after Coulston contacted the *Grauniad*'s consumer help page. Dozens of other pissed-off travellers added their accounts of bad experiences at the hands of Ryanair.

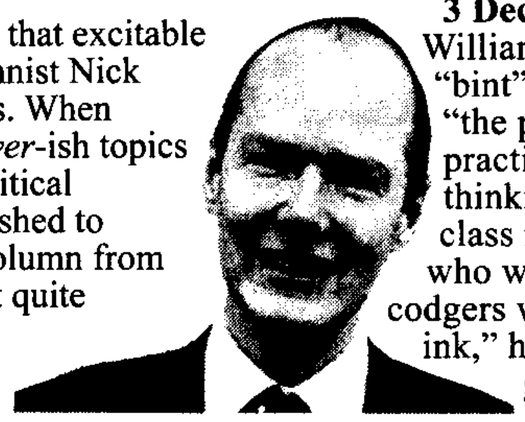
Last year O'Leary took his case, on trademark grounds, to Nominet, which resolves domain name disputes. He won and Coulston's site was banished from cyberspace. Undaunted, Coulston set-up a new website, www.ryanaircampaign.org, so passengers could once again let off steam. Again O'Leary called in his legal team, which took the case to the World Intellectual Property Organisation, a panel of the U.N., claiming Coulston's site infringed its trademarks and should be surrendered to the company.

In a judgment a few days before Christmas, the panel found that Coulston was acting in good faith and could keep his website. After the ruling he said: "This would all have died down if Ryanair had not tried to bully me."

HACKWATCH

Jasper Gerard

TWO months ago the *Observer* introduced its "brilliant new columnist", former gossip hack Jasper Gerard. Hacks at the paper were baffled, given that there's a recruitment freeze. Readers have been equally surprised, bombarding the venerable liberal newspaper with letters asking why they have to endure a ham-fisted half-wit who'd be more at home in the *Daily Express*.



What happened, it seems, is that excitable editor Roger Alton asked columnist Nick Cohen to write about celebrities. When Cohen said he preferred *Observer*-ish topics such as criminal justice and political corruption, he had his space slashed to accommodate a Glenda-style column from Gerard. Alas for Alton, it hasn't quite worked out as expected…

29 October. "Football matches are won by the team that has scored most goals when the referee blows his whistle," the new boy reveals. "Wars can be harder to call. In our tricky away fixture against lowly Iraq, manager George W Bush, who seems to have learned everything he knows from Steve McLaren, claimed all three points were in the bag. But it transpired we had barely reached half-time." Gerard chases this desperate analogy through another seven paragraphs. His conclusion? "This is so mad and bad it is painfully funny." Well, painful anyway. Suddenly remembering that celebs are required, he observes that Kate Moss looked "suitably minxy" at a masked ball last week – and "Kylie has a fantastic arse".

5 November. Someone has paid $140m for a Jackson Pollock. "Staggering how much bunce you can make from a load of old Pollocks," Gerard chuckles. "Please, oh omnipotent critics, admit it: placed against Picasso, he looks like a load of old bollocks." *(You've done this pun already – Ed.)* But he doesn't forget the bimbo quotient: "Kate Moss, having done so much to keep Columbia's [*sic*] balance of payments in the black, is crowned model of the year. There is talk of a lifetime achievement award for her nose." Brilliant!

12 November. "If Asbos were issued by *Vogue*, Freddy Eastwood would be in trouble," Gerard writes of the Southend striker who knocked Man Utd out of the cup. "He is what less politically correct commentators would term a pikey." But, er, hasn't Gerard just called him a pikey too? "You can hardly blame Eastwood for having a mobile home that isn't actually mobile," he adds, warming to the theme. "Of course it doesn't have wheels – forget homes, no cars within five miles of a gypsy camp keep wheels for long."

19 November. Despite complaints galore about the last column, editor Roger Alton defends his witless *protégé*. "I think it is simply ludicrous that we cannot make jokes about a minority." But readers' editor Stephen Pritchard disagrees. Describing the comments as "snide stereotyping" and "knee-jerk attacks on minority groups", he rules that "the editor was wrong to allow them in the paper". Gerard retreats to the safer territory of *I'm a Celebrity*: "Fears grow for Myleene Klass's breasts: they've not been seen for 24 minutes." Among *Observer* readers, fears grow that "Jasper Gerard" is the new pseudonym of Garry Bushell.

26 November. Are all Muslims mad extremists? It seems so. "Like a famous Belgian, a moderate Muslim is devilishly elusive," Gerard quips. And so to more important matters – Britney Spears's sex video ("when exposure is all for modern celebs, even your privates are public") and a guest appearance in *Little Britain* by, er, Kate Moss.

3 December. After dismissing Prince William's girlfriend Kate Middleton as a "bint", Gerard comes out as a member of "the persecuted minority that still practises such alien customs as reading, thinking and conversing" – a civilised class now threatened by the "morons" who write blogs. "Bloggers are the codgers who used to write letters in green ink," he sniffs. "They probably include gifted amateurs whose vodding and blogging will earn them a proper job. As for the rest, well, everyone has a right to write; but a right to be heard still has to be earned." You said it, matey…

10 December. Time for a desperate hack's annual stand-by – 700 words of flannel on commercialism and Christmas. Gerard reckons the festival is dead, "killed by us, nailed on the cross. Brent Cross." Or not, as the case may be: "To give meaning to their present of a CD by Faithless, they want Jesus Christ there to confirm they are faithful. The jury might be out on Christ, but you don't need to be a wise man to see Christmas has risen again." Geddit!?! Meanwhile the celebrity count has dwindled to nothing. Does Gerard now think he's a serious pundit, perchance?

17 December. He does indeed. "Supposedly socially-concerned commentators have been no more insightful than politicos about these stomach-churning strangulations," he opines, noting that the Suffolk murder victims were drug addicts. His insightful solution? Tell Afghans to stop growing poppies, and "if farmers still sow fields of poison, bomb the buggers".

24 December. "Welcome to the Jaspers," Gerard chortles, introducing his awards for 2006. Step forward Zara Phillips ("the first royal to ride a horse without looking like one"), former hostage Norman Kember ("what a loudmouth… no wonder hostage-takers were keen to be shot of him") – and Jordan's breasts, "which have, by their high standards, not had enough exposure this year. The pair's role is to stand here amusingly so we can print a gratuitous photo, while our readers work out if we are being ironic (we are not). Anyway, hope you enjoy the Jaspers as much as I have."

Some hope. According to colleagues, even the editor has begun to notice that his experiment in dumbing-down is a disaster. But how can he evict the world's worst columnist without admitting he was a berk to hire him in the first place? Suggestions on a postcard please to Roger Alton, The *Observer*, 3-7 Herbal Hill, London EC1R 5EJ.

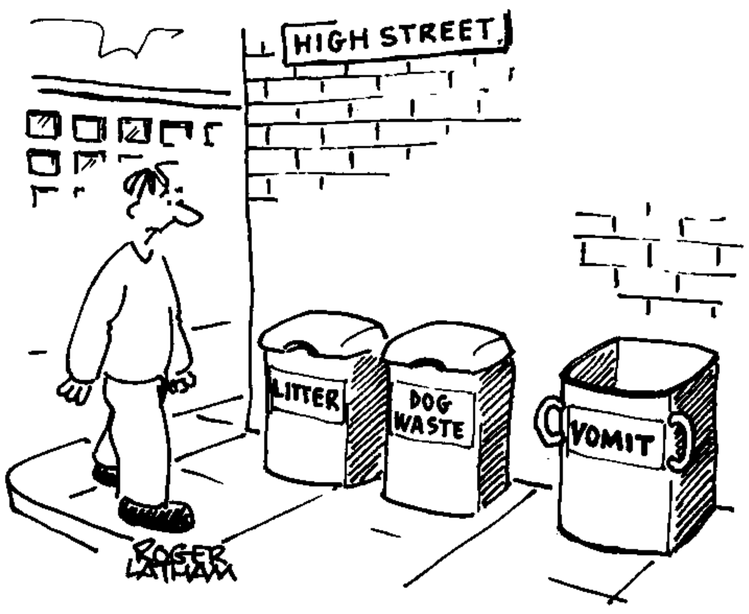
O·B·N

"As much as we think we know who Courtney Love is, nothing prepares you for the sprawling intelligence or the keen beauty of her."

LAURA BARTON
The Guardian

Submitted by Stephen Whittle

£10 paid for entries put forward for the Order of the Brown Nose.



THE Hutton report into the death of Dr David Kelly following the "weapons of mass destruction" affair concluded that Andrew Gilligan's report that the government had "sexed up" its WMD dossier was "unfounded" and that the BBC's editorial and management processes were "defective".

The BBC agreed immediately and within two days, Gilligan, D-G Greg Dyke and BBC Chairman Gavyn Davies were all sacrificed in an unprecedented fit of grovelling. BBC journalism was deemed to be suspect and BBC News was plunged into crisis.

Back in June 2005 new evidence emerged which suggested that Andrew Gilligan was right. Former diplomat Carne Ross told the Butler inquiry: "I knew that the evidence they were presenting for WMD was totally implausible. I'd read the intelligence on WMD for four and a half years, and there's no way that it could sustain the case that the government was presenting."

Two weeks ago the Commons Select Committee on Foreign Affairs published yet more evidence from Ross: "at no time did HMG [Her Majesty's Government] assess that Iraq's WMD (or any other capability) posed a threat to the UK or its interests", he said – a view shared by Foreign Secretary Margaret Beckett.

Gilligan, Dyke, Davies and BBC journalists await an apology from the government and from Alastair Campbell.

TONY BLAIR's heart would have sunk if he read Anthony Seldon's article in the *Guardian* just before Christmas.

Seldon had in fact come to praise the vicar, not bury him, predicting that the enduring reputation of this "political colossus" will be far stronger than his critics allow: "Blair may yet leave on a high point, and (almost) at the moment of his own choosing." As a political soothsayer, however, he has a track record that nearly rivals that of our old friend Mystic Mogg.

In the mid-1990s, as John Major's biographer, Seldon issued regular prophecies of triumph. Major had "put the Conservatives on course for the fifth general election victory which many believed to be impossible", he informed Times readers in October 1994. "He could yet have the last laugh."

As late as October 1996 he announced in the Daily Mail that "the Tories in the general election could win back the by-election losses since 1992, which would give them a working majority… The Tories remain a formidable fighting force… The outcome of the general election is still open." Seven months later the Conservatives suffered their worst electoral catastrophe since 1906.

Whereupon Seldon promptly became the biographer of Tony Blair. He launched the book in summer 2004 with a prediction that "by Christmas there may be a major showdown with Brown and Blair may be forced to fire him. The current status quo can't go on."

No mention of that in his latest Grauniad article. Seldon now advises us that Blair will announce his departure "soon after 7 March next year, when he hopes fresh elections to the Northern Ireland assembly could lead to a breakthrough in the province". Since most other political observers think so too, he could even be right for once.

But don't bet on it.

Seasons Greetings from Farnham MP

Farnham Herald

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you all once again for your continued support and wish you all a very merry Christmas and a prosperous new ear.

Jeremy Hunt

CALLED TO ORDURE

THE new year looks likely to be an anxious one for those concerned with public broadcasting. Parliament had just broken up for Christmas when "Government sources" let slip that the BBC will receive a below-inflation deal on its licence fee.

This crafty news management – using spin doctors and blaming Gordon Brown – was all the grottier given that Culture Secretary Tessa Jowell spent the penultimate day of the parliamentary term in the Commons chamber, discussing… the BBC. Shouldn't she have made the announcement there and then?

Jowell was debating the Digital Switchover (Disclosure of Information) Bill. This is a geeky name for a sly bit of political flak avoidance. Jowell is worried that when the analogue signal is turned off over the next six years and is replaced by digital, millions of TVs will go on the blink. Imagine the outcry if millions of voters are denied access to *EastEnders*. Jowell is therefore forcing the Beeb to help organise and pay for the switchover project. If it all goes arse-up she will then have someone to condemn.

Digital switchover is of immense concern to MPs (the great god telly!) and the debate was well attended. Jowell, whose expertise with estimates has been shown with the London Olympics, announced that switchover will cost £600m.

Her approach is to be incredibly nannyish (her default setting) and generous (it's not her budget, after all). She hinted that seven million homes would be given state aid to alter their TVs.

Among those to be helped are "elderly people with a second TV set that is very old [who might have] some difficulty in fitting it with a set-top box". Jowell's big eyes swelled at the thought of all these ancients with their valve-operated apparatuses. "It is highly likely that a significant number of sets will be redundant at the end of the process," she added, gulping like a tragic thespian.

Chris Mullin (Lab, Sunderland S) asked about the environmental consequences of binning millions of TVs. Jowell's waffly reply translated as, "er, oh yes, good idea, we'd better think about that".

If the state is going to replace old tellies, as seems possible, it should be great news for TV manufacturers and retailers. Large corporate donations to Labour funds will no doubt ensue.

Several MPs spoke about any interruption to TV viewing as though it was a question of life and death. Labour hard-man Fraser Kemp (Houghton) sounded bereft when he claimed some video recorders might no longer work quite so well. There was much discussion of "digital penetration", a term loaded with Carry-On nuance given that Chris Bryant (Lab, Rhondda), he of the Gaydar website underpants, kept jumping into the debate.

Politicians, seldom slow to criticise BBC output, clutched their necks in distress at the thought that anyone might have to pay to tweak their own TV sets to get a good picture. But John Whittingdale (Con, Maldon) pointed out that digital penetration is already running at 70 percent (ie 17 million homes). Is it not possible that the remaining 30 per cent will have caught up of their own volition by 2012? Some Britons might even be happy to do without a TV.

Jowell said there will be a "help scheme" to assist "vulnerable" people. "Many, for example, need help learning to use unfamiliar remote controls and on-screen menus," she said. Great. So the government is now going to teach people how to use remotes. Each eligible household – not least core Labour voters on income support and jobseeker's allowance – will be paid to convert their sets. The likes of the Royle family can rest easy on their backsides. Nanny Jowell is going to send round a man from Currys.

All this is going to be paid for by the BBC, which, we have since learned, is not going to be given the money it says it needs. If MPs had known this they might have given Jowell a much harder time. Julie Kirkbride (Con, Bromsgrove) did point out the "irony" of a regressive tax like the licence fee being used to help the poor.

Then up popped Robert Syms, a lugubrious, sloping-shouldered Tory from Poole. Syms has done little of public note since his arrival in 1997 but his speech in this debate was a minor classic. "I love watching TV," he said, in an Eeyore monotone. "The one thing that made me think twice about standing for Parliament was that the hours we work mean we often miss a lot of prime-time TV." Now there's a man with the public service ethos!

Syms morosely predicted that switchover would be "extremely fraught" – for MPs. "I suspect we will get involved in sorting out the problems of constituents," he added. "A dedicated line or dedicated staff to help with MPs' complaints would b helpful."

In other words: sod the public, this switchover's going to be a nightmare for us MPs because of all the whingers who'll ask us for help. The government quickly promised to look into the possibility of a special help desk for MPs.

Syms then left the Chamber – presumably to go and catch *Coronation Street*.

'Gavel Basher'

"WHEN your old chum and convicted fraudster Darius Guppy told you he was going to beat somebody up, why did you reply 'yah, yah, I'll help you'?" one George Ferris asked Tory MP Boris Johnson in the *Independent*'s "You ask the questions" feature on 2 January.

"He said that some tabloid scuzzbags had reduced his family to tears," replied the honourable member for Henley, swiftly moving to another topic.

How noble! But younger readers deserve slightly more context if they are to fully comprehend the 1990 conversation between Johnson, then Brussels correspondent for the *Daily Telegraph,* and his Eton pal Guppy. The "tabloid scuzzbag" in question, the *News of the World*'s Stuart Collier, was making enquiries about a police investigation into the £1.8m insurance fraud for which Guppy was later jailed for five years. As well as the tale of his sobbing relatives he also told Johnson, whom he was trying to persuade to provide him with Collier's home address, that "of all the people I have ever met, not one is as psychopathic, potentially, as me. This guy has got my blood up and there is nothing I won't do to get my revenge." Boris, having ascertained that Collier would "not be put into intensive care or anything like that", happily agreed to fulfil his side of the bargain. All for the sake of those crying kiddies, you understand.

"Is that sunburn or are you just embarrassed?"

THE ARMED FARCES

COULD there be cold feet at Ministry of Defence HQ as the much anticipated announcement of £19bn worth of defence training PFI contracts (see *Eyes passim*) was postponed just before Parliament broke up for Christmas?

Many believe another expensive PFI contract is all the forces need. The MoD was humiliated by an inquest's findings last month that shortages of armour led to the death of Sergeant Steven Roberts in Iraq in 2003, while the *Eye* (issue 1167) recently disclosed how central MoD spending was being slashed because of over-runs on "major contracts such as PFIs". And that's without the latest cross-Whitehall cuts announced by Gordon in last month's pre-budget report.

The size of the MoD's financial hole marked "PFI" has only just emerged. Deals already signed and officially valued at £5.3bn will in fact require payments totalling £26.3bn – almost a whole year's defence budget. And that's without some very big ones in the pipeline.

Among the exorbitant contracts is one for the recent refurbishment of the MoD HQ in Whitehall itself. The PFI deal was priced at £746.1m in 2000 against an estimated cost for public funding of £746.2m (magically just £0.1m more expensive after £103m in "risk factors" was added; who says the calculations are fiddled?). Now MoD figures show the deal will end up costing three times as much at £2.35bn. Even when adjusted for inflation, that's a big hike.

Not only will this profligacy stick in the craw of troops struggling with inadequate kit, it might even be making MoD mandarins and New Labour ministers ponder whether now really is the time to add yet more PFI bills to an overstretched defence budget.

P.S. Don't expect an outbreak of financial commonsense in Whitehall too soon, however. The MoD's advisers on the training PFI are none other than PricewaterhouseCoopers, the same government advisers who failed to spot that VAT might have to be paid on the Olympics.

GOOD to see the forces' top brass taking a thoroughly modern approach to cashing in on their service as General Sir Mike Jackson, recently retired Chief of the General Staff, becomes senior adviser to PA Consulting.

Gone are the days when the big cheeses merely chose from a selection of arms company boards to supplement their retirement income. With management consultancy now consuming over £200m of the national defence budget every year, a whole new world has opened up. Few have been as quick to make the most of it as PA – MoD statistics show it paid PA between £10m and £25m in 2004/05, making the MoD one of PA's major clients. And that's without the huge fees also paid to PA by companies such as BAe, Boeing, Thales and a host of others that win lucrative MoD contracts on the back of consultants' advice.

One of Jackson's demands in his recent Dimbleby Lecture (given a few days before the PA job was announced) was that Whitehall, and particularly the MoD, should get its act together. "Our ability to integrate the departments of state in pursuit of strategic national objectives lacks sufficiently authoritative machinery," he said. Music to the ears of PA, of course, which has just established its Defence Information Infrastructure programme at the MoD and is bidding for more work in the area of departmental integration.

Jackson, whose role in promoting many a consultancy-friendly initiative was reported in the last *Eye*, will be well placed to keep the cash rolling in as he is lined up to chair a special Defence Advisory Board as well as working directly with PA's clients, presumably including the MoD, although he is banned from lobbying ministers until August.

Down on the Farm

HUNDREDS of west country farmers faced a crisis in the weeks running up to Christmas, thanks to a bizarre blunder by officials of the Meat Hygiene Service, part of the Food Standards Agency.

Over a large area of Devon, Cornwall and west Somerset, the only abattoir licensed under EU rules to slaughter cattle over 30 months old was West Devon Meat at Hatherleigh, taking around 1,000 animals a week. Under supervision by the MHS, brain tissue samples would be sent away for analysis, to see whether any of the slaughtered cattle showed signs of BSE.

A few weeks back, however, the FSA discovered that in a batch of 350 samples, one had gone missing. Total panic ensued. The officials withdrew the abattoir's licence, which meant that it had to lay off 60 of its staff (a Christmas present much appreciated by all those involved). Farmers were landed with trying to negotiate a place at the nearest licensed abattoir remaining open, at Bridgwater in Somerset, which meant for some having to transport their cattle 150 miles. Many farmers, unable to get a slot, have been forced to keep their animals on the farm, consuming expensive feed as they wait their place in the queue.

Meanwhile the FSA discovered the missing sample. It had been placed in the same pot as another, which meant that no samples had gone missing after all. Furthermore, analysis showed that not a single one of the 350 samples tested positive for BSE. But this was not enough for the officials, who insisted that West Devon Meat could not have its licence back until they had completed their investigation into why that single sample briefly went missing.

This, of course, is from the same organisation, the FSA, which a few years back was desperate to prove that sheep could be infected with BSE. In 2001 Defra became so fearful that this was possible that it even published its plans to slaughter every one of the 40 million sheep in Britain. The reason for its panic was that Defra scientists working for the Institute for Animal Health had been carrying out tests on sheep brains which seemed to show clearly that, after massive injections of BSE tissue, some had become infected. Only at the last minute was it discovered that the "sheep" brains the institute's scientists had been testing for five years were in fact those of BSE-infected cows. Curiously enough, no one at the IAH ever lost their job as the result of this extraordinary blunder – unlike those 60 employees of West Devon Meat five years later.

'Muckspreader'

IN THE COURTS

TWO years ago Lord Falconer, whose main qualification to be Lord Chancellor was his friendship with the Prime Minister, appointed one Wyn Williams to be the permanent local Chancery judge in Cardiff.

The Lord Chancellor declared Williams to be the right person for the job – in defiance of the advice of the Commission for Judicial Appointments, which, after a lengthy selection process, had made a different recommendation for the post. Falconer was forced on to the defensive in parliamentary exchanges on the subject.

But from this year onwards a revamped Commission will appoint new High Court judges, and Falconer and his cronies will no longer be able to tell them what to do.

Obviously this change had nothing to do with Falconer's announcement on 21 December - just after Parliament had closed down for a month and everyone was thinking about Christmas - of Mr Williams' appointment as one of five new High Court judges. Mr Williams can now look forward to the customary knighthood and a handy salary increase.

EDUCASHUN

BAD news for exam markers Edexhell – five years after being described as "sloppy" in a Cabinet Office report (*Eyes passim*) they are finally starting to lose government business.

In December the National Assessment Agency (NAA) announced that its preferred bidder for the contract to mark national curriculum key stage tests from May 2008 onwards was not current provider Edexcel but American not-for-profit company ETS Global BV – the same people who run the American SAT tests and the GREs for university entrance.

Bungling Edexcel was lambasted in 2002 after a catalogue of errors, including delivering exam papers late, losing papers and messing up grading. The 2003 takeover by Pearson raised worries about commercial for-profit interests getting involved in public exams and 2005 saw secretarial staff roped in to mark GCSE Religious Studies papers because not enough teachers had been recruited.

The *Times Education Supplement* recently reported Edexcel's plans to trial marking essays by computer, striking horror into the academic community. However, with the NAA already talking up ETS Global's "expertise in technology" that may be one idea that isn't going away with the changeover.

BRUSSELS SPROUTS

A NEW European Commission scheme for EU laws to ban "inciting, aiding or abetting" terrorism has got publishers and journalists worried about censorship.

The idea was floated in the fevered days after 9/11 when ministers from the member states issued a flurry of decisions to promote greater police co-operation. But the questionnaire now landing on desks in Brussels goes much further. As well as creating the offences of "inciting, aiding and abetting", it raises the possibility of new, rather vaguely defined offences such as the "glorification" of terrorism and indeed "apology" for it. The questionnaire also posits the outlawing of "indirect incitement", even though it admits there is no legal definition of "incitement" in the original ministerial decision!

The Commission says the questionnaire is part of a "general public consultation". Except that it's not: it doesn't appear in the list of currently open consultations on the Commission's justice and home affairs website, and has only been sent to a few carefully selected "stakeholders".

The exercise highlights a serious lack of transparency in EU discussions about policing and security. Questions are being raised as to why EU laws against "incitement" of terrorism are needed when countries like the UK have shown they are perfectly capable of introducing their own. But Brussels is becoming a useful talking shop for governments that find it a convenient channel for taking controversial decisions that are difficult to force through national parliaments.

Indeed, the Commission is currently working its way through the Hague Programme Action Plan, a series of measures agreed by member states in 2005. This long, long list includes such highlights as "widespread use of biometric identifiers", and sharing across EU databases containing DNA profiles, fingerprints, and identity registry information.

All of which, of course, makes the current exercise on glorification and incitement look like a drop in the ocean!

EU-phemisms

It's in a different colour cover

ITV

Test Cricket – The Ashes (BBC2)
Test Cricket (Sky Sports)
Ashes Breakfast (BBC Radio Five Live)

SIGNING off BBC2's highlights programme from the third day of the fourth England v Australia test, host Manish Bhasin blurted, "Goodbye, have a good year", before hastily correcting himself: "A good new year, that is."

But it's little wonder that the presenter was tormented by fantasies of viewers not tuning in for another twelve months, or that he became confused about where he was. Bhasin wasn't due to read the link sending hogmanay compliments for another two days. But, with England losing before close on the third, the sports staff were left with two days extra leisure time and BBC2 schedulers desperately scrabbling for comedy repeats to fill the empty slots before returning for an irrelevant fifth test in Sydney, which will surely attract almost no interest.

One of the reasons generally given for the failure of cricket to catch on in America is that US broadcasters wouldn't tolerate a sport which lasts for almost a week. But the real resistance from the networks would be less the length of the matches as the uncertainty over their duration. Even if rain disrupts a tennis tournament a broadcaster has bought, the games will eventually be played, a day or two late. But in cricket, if a weak team is against a strong one, the channel may be paying massive fees for dead-rubber matches or empty air.

Sky Sports and the BBC do not seem to have allowed for this cruel fact of the summer game when, in an ecstasy of enthusiasm following England's Ashes victory of 2005, they committed big budgets and numerous timeslots to the return games in Australia. At the time, both the dish boys and the public service chaps thought they had a great deal, expecting to clean up on the euphoria of cricket's new dawn.

But with the Ashes ceasing to be competitive after 14 of the scheduled 25 days of test cricket, broadcasters find themselves in the horrible position of being contractually obliged to keep the cameras rolling after the lord mayor's show.

" 'Sports Review of the Year' is very succinct this year"

For example, BBC2's *Test Cricket – The Ashes*, the nightly half-hour highlights programme that's supposed to mark the Beeb's triumphant return to the game's high table after being starved out by Sky, had the smart idea of exploiting the time differences by linking the previous day's highlights live from a ground filling up in anticipation of the next day, providing thrilling background atmosphere. But with so many games falling short, Bhasin and his pundits, Geoffrey Boycott and Jonathan Agnew, have frequently found themselves standing gloomily in front of concrete terraces being swept of litter, a visual disaster.

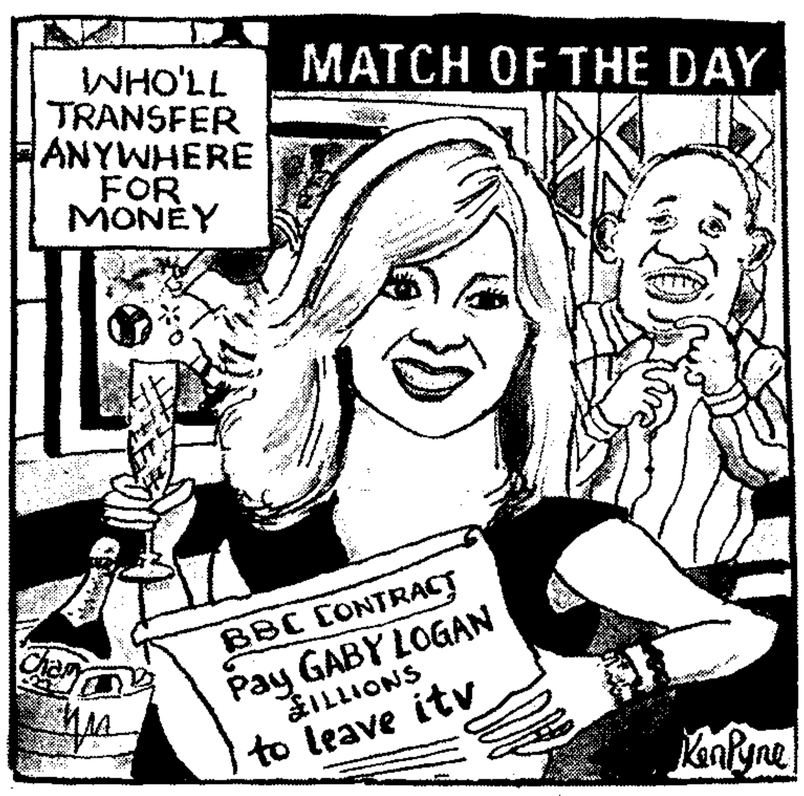
But at least the BBC has sensibly filled the unneeded slots with docs or sit-coms. On Sky's *Test Cricket*, host Charles Colville was forced to follow the highlights from the truncated third day of the Melbourne test with a trail for "a Fourth Test review", filling three two-hour slots on the now actionless fourth day. Given that only a very small number of masochists could possibly be interested in watching England's humiliation in a competitively pointless game for a second time, Sky's Head of Sports cannot have spent a very restful Christmas.

Things, though, were even worse on radio. Faced with the seasonal problem of regular presenters who take Xmas off, Five Live bosses had the theoretically smart idea of sending Mark Pougatch and Julian Worricker to Melbourne and Sydney to present a special *Ashes Breakfast* each morning from the grounds, supplanting the regular Nicky Campbell-Shelagh Fogarty show. This plan was already in trouble when the Ashes were surrendered before the series even reached Melbourne but, when that test finished early, the Australian-based presenters were left uneasily reading out reports of helicopter crashes in Lancashire.

Even now, the plans can't be abandoned. So all the broadcasters tried to come up with ways of making the now fantastically pointless fifth test enticing. "Join us in Sydney to see if England can avoid a 5-0 whitewash!", roared Colville on Sky, the sporting equivalent of expecting election night viewers to stay up to see if the opposition loses by 199 or 200 seats. Bhasin, on BBC2, even referred to Sydney as the "fearsome final Ashes test", a formula used earlier in the series but unfortunately retained on the Autocue.

The only fear, though, will be from sports departments waiting for the memos from the programme directors. Expect the next cricket contracts to include an equivalent of builders' "completion guarantees".

'Remote Controller'



MEDIA NEWS

THE rehabilitation of Lord Archer continues apace with this week's launch of *Fortune: Million Pound Giveaway* on ITV.

The idea is that five millionaires on a "celebrity panel" – including Archer – will each give away £200,000 of their own money to members of the public whose pitches they find most appealing.

We trust ITV obtained the money up front, bearing in mind Jeff's long record of not quite delivering as much dosh as expected. After his libel victory over the *Daily Star* 18 years ago, "friends of Archer" claimed that £50,000 from his £500,000 damages was earmarked for Cheltenham Ladies' College; in fact, only £1,000 arrived. He was also reported to be handing over "a big slice" to Kew Gardens, but a spokeswoman for the gardens revealed that although he made a small gift, "it certainly was not a big slice, nowhere near". The Sports Aid foundation, another alleged beneficiary of his largesse, said it had no record of any donation from Archer.

Then came his Simple Truth concert in May 1991, after which a triumphant Archer held up a placard boasting that it had raised £57m to aid Iraqi Kurds. Five years ago, after his imprisonment, an audit by KPMG concluded that the figure was a figment of his legendary imagination. The British Red Cross Simple Truth Appeal raised £13.8m in the UK, but "Archer had no role to play in the collection of funds by the British Red Cross". As for a further £31.5m which he claimed to have raised from foreign governments, KPMG was "unable to verify the figure" and had seen "no analysis of the build-up of this figure or contemporaneous supporting documentation. It appears that the British Red Cross substantially relied upon Archer to provide the figure". When the auditors visited him in jail, the master storyteller admitted that he couldn't explain how he reached such a total.

After his release, Archer entered the 2004 London marathon with a characteristic boast – that he was raising £1.66m, thus breaking the world record for marathon sponsorship. Asked about it in June 2004, two months after the race, he said: "There will be an announcement shortly." Needless to say, nothing more has been heard of his "record-breaking" feat.

THE BBC's promise that it'll cover sports news more seriously was deflated just before Christmas when it announced, to much fanfare, that its new weekly sports news show is to be presented by that well-known heavyweight Gabby Logan, who has been recruited on a salary of £450,000.

The *Times*, which reported the birth of Logan's twins on its front page 18 months ago, gave similarly unstinting coverage this time, running a 700-word puff piece as well as a suitably festive picture on its back page of Logan with a Christmas tree – this on the day after there had been a League Cup quarter-final and the breaking news of Shane Warne's Test retirement.

The *Times* described her as "the most high-profile female sports presenter on British television" – apparently forgetting Sue Barker and Clare Balding, who have fronted more live coverage from the Olympics, Wimbledon and Ascot than Logan has ever managed in her years at Sky and ITV. Her most high-profile achievement in the last year was being dropped from anchoring ITV's coverage of the Champions League and then the World Cup. Despite much hype about the BBC's "coup" in poaching her, ITV was only too pleased to let her go.

What is Gabby's greatest ambition now she's at the Beeb? You guessed: to appear on this year's *Strictly Come Dancing*.

OH YEAH? "I broke all the rules without ever thinking of it, I broke all the rules... I think I'm the most radical rock star there's ever been. There's nobody more radical than me." — **Cliff Richard, Radio 2**

BIRTSPEAK 2.0

From the BBC's "Creative Facilitation: Creative tools" web page:

Icebreakers

● Get everyone to stand in a circle. They throw a ball to each other and have to shout out a word connected with a subject you give them i.e. ways of communicating, modes of travel etc.

● Where do you live in the UK? One side of the room is John O'Groats, the other side is Land's End, they have to get themselves in the right order.

● How long have you worked in the BBC? Line up in order of length of service.

● Porn star name. Give each person a name tag and ask them to write down the name of their first pet and their mother's maiden name. These will combine to form their porn star name. Ask each person to introduce their neighbour using this name and inventing a fictional biography.

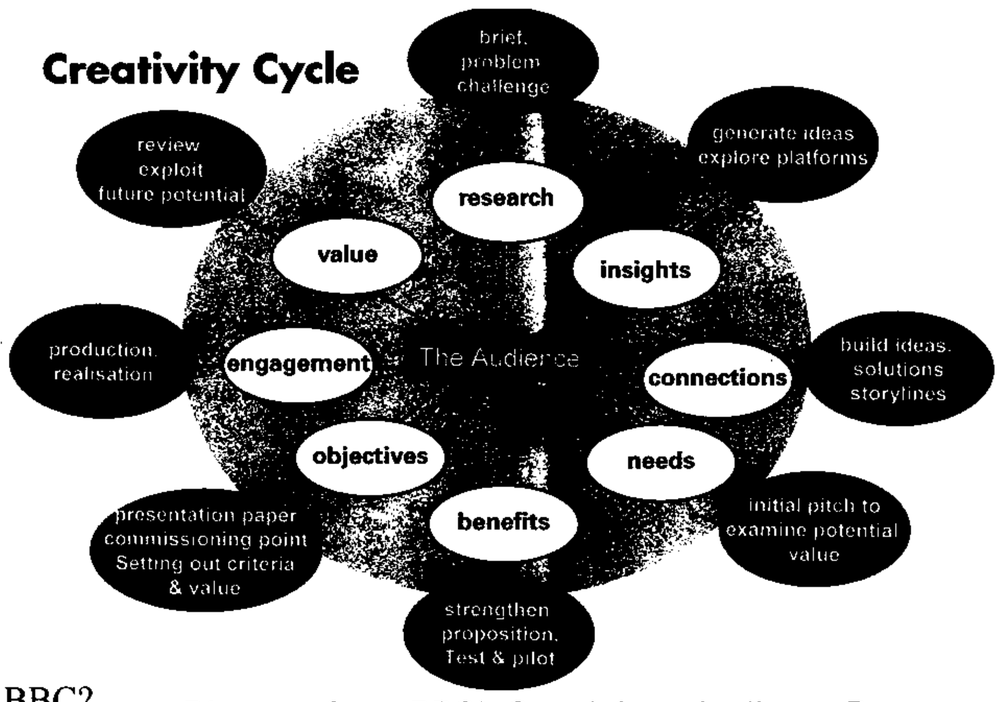


Diagram from BBC's Creativity + Audience Dept.

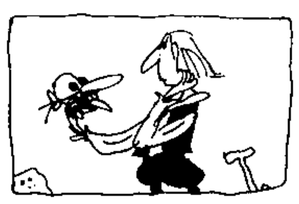
● Ask people to turn to their neighbour and find three books they have read in common. Put random words on coloured cards. Ask everyone to look for someone with the same colour card as theirs. Using these words, can they come up with a sentence or phrase based on the brainstorm.

THE BBC is gearing up for another batch of *The Apprentice*, fronted by supposed business genius Sir Alan Sugar.

Curiously, although the closing date for entries passed months ago, the website of programme producer TalkbackThames is still encouraging applicants to send in emails and suggests they could yet be considered. It seems the number of candidates willing to humiliate themselves in front of Sir Alan is rather smaller than the BBC constantly implies.

Which could also be said about the size of his business "empire", now limited to Sky satellite dishes and set-top boxes, "3rd generation" emailer phones and the Integra Face Care System, which supposedly reduces wrinkles. For the vital Christmas market, Amstrad had precisely no new product ranges on offer.

LUVVIES



"I didn't want to do it [a new episode of This Life]," admits Lincoln... "But the other guys said they wanted to. I read the script again, and thought that it was quite an interesting idea to film it as they were suggesting, in a documentary style. I eventually went, 'F*** it! Why be in thrall to the critics? Why not do a love letter to the fanbase?'"

ANDREW LINCOLN,
The Times

Submitted by Francis Harvey

DUMB BRITAIN

Weakest Link, BBC2

Anne Robinson: What G was the complex knot severed by Alexander the Great in the fourth century BC?

Contestant: Granny.

Anne Robinson: What is the highest mountain in Scotland, Ben... what?

Contestant: Ben Everest.

Talksport radio's Christmas day quiz

Presenter: Prince Albert was married to which Queen?

Contestant (after some thought): Er... Natalie?

Celebrity Mastermind, BBC1

John Humphrys: Who was Bill Clinton's vice-president until 2002?

Sir Ranulph Fiennes: Lewinsky.

BUPA's sponsorship of the *Breakfast Show* on Edinburgh radio station Talk 107 provides an ideal opportunity to keep its Murrayfield Hospital at the forefront of local minds.

Patients may, however, have become subconsciously less willing to go there for treatment given that the station continued using a blast of James Brown's *I Got You (I Feel Good)* in its sponsor trails for several days after the singer's much-publicised death from pneumonia in Atlanta.

AD NAUSEAM

THIS is the season of goodwill, as shoppers punching each other in sales queues will merrily attest. Adland, however, appears to be pushing public goodwill to the limit, indulging in a bout of festive plagiarism unprecedented even by the standards documented in this column in the past.

Camelot's Christmas Lotto TV spot, for example, shows a suburban des res that erupts in a full-scale *sons et lumieres* display, as a battery of Christmas lights go berserk in sequence with a jingly soundtrack. "Imagine if you won this Christmas," says the voiceover. The real winners here, of course, are Camelot's ad agency AMV.BBDO, because, in a development that is becoming increasingly common among adland's "creatives", the whole set-up is borrowed from a viral clip (*Eyes passim*). In 2004 an electrical engineer in Ohio called Carson Williams spent over two months choreographing 16,000 lights to the Trans-Siberian Orchestra's "Wizards in Winter", (the same track used in AMV's Lotto rip-off). A video of his display soon became hot internet currency.

For AMV to steal Mr Williams' party-piece would be sleazy enough, but they're not even the first agency to nobble the idea – this time last year Miller Lite beer in the US did the same. Miller, however, at least had the grace to use Williams' display (by this time upgraded to over 25,000 lights), and hence to pay him for his idea.

OVER at another high-flying agency, however, they appear to have run out of ideas altogether. TBWA has launched a website where the only attempt at original thought seems to be the name: TheBigWhatAdventure.com.

"We believe that a good idea can come from anywhere," says the blurb. As such TBWA are graciously going to let the general public submit ideas for real client briefs, beginning with Sony's PlayStation 3, one of TBWA's flagship accounts. In other words, this "experiment in open-source creativity" is an attempt to get the public to do TBWA's work for them.

"We can't promise to comment on every piece of work submitted but we do promise that if we use your idea we'll reward you for it," the website goes on. So perhaps they are going to play fair after all? Come on, what do you think this is, Christmas? The smallprint signs over all intellectual property rights from the public's ideas to TBWA, "without payment to you".

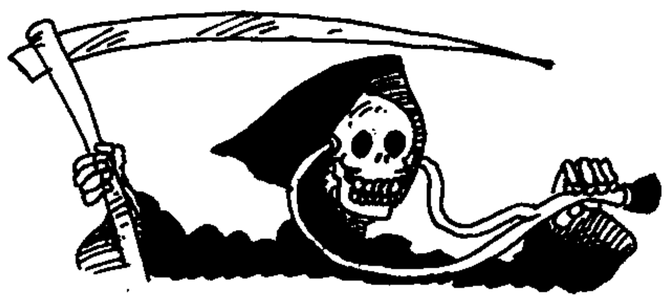
Each fortnight The Cartoon Museum at 35 Little Russell Street is featuring a bubble competition as part of the *'Private Eye at 45'* cartoon exhibition.

This issue's winner is **Tom Sanders** from London W14.

SUPERMODELS

KERBER

THE STYLE EDITORS:
SO THAT'S DECIDED THEN..... "2007" IS THE NEW "2006"!
LOVE IT DARLING!!!
GOD... IT'S LIKE SOOO INNOVATIVE!!!
THE MODELS:
HAPPY NEW YEAR
GOD, I'M REALLY LOOKING FORWARD TO 07!!!
07'S GREAT!... THEN YOU GET TO 06, THEN 05... AND EVENTUALLY, AFTER A WHILE, YOU REACH SIZE 00!!!
KATE AND PETE:
HERE'S TO ANOTHER YEAR OF US COURTING!
YES..... COURT NUMBER 1, COURT NUMBER 2, MAGISTRATES COURT, HIGH COURT....



DOING THE ROUNDS

Choose and Balls-up

IN SEPTEMBER 2005, 78-year-old *Eye* reader Gordon Beare had a knee operation. Alas, this made one leg shorter than the other, necessitating orthopaedic shoes to level them up.

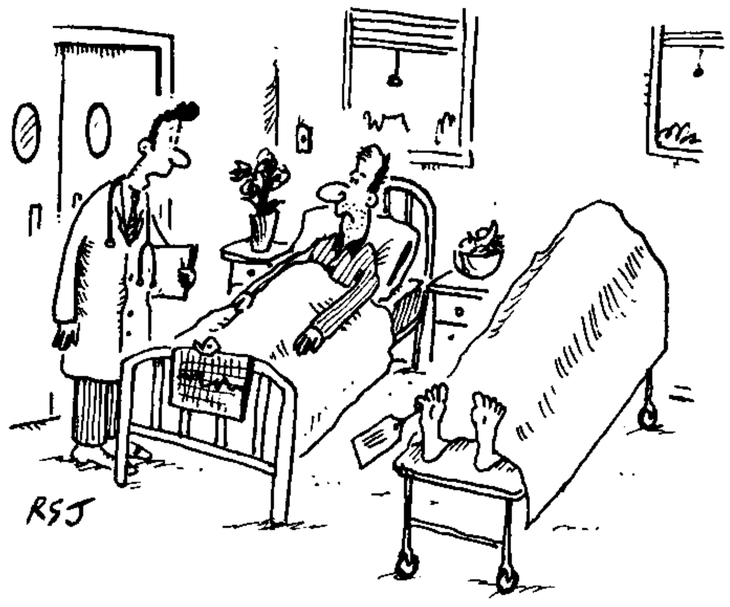
Until recently, his GP would have organised referral to the orthotic department of his local hospital but under the new system of Choose and Book, Mr Beare has to organise his own referral by phoning the Clinical Assessment Service. He then has to choose one of fifteen units on offer and quote his unique booking reference number (0000-9236-9596) and password ("cake counter").

If he prefers, he can book over the internet at www.nhs.uk/healthspace and select "Choose and Book". However, he needs to be careful entering his password to put a space between "cake" and "counter". If he doesn't like "cake counter" he can go back to his GP and ask for it to be changed, or he can do it over the phone (0845 608 8888), via text phone (0845 850 2250) or internet (see above).

More important for Mr Beale is to know which of the fifteen units makes the best orthopaedic shoes, but alas he is given no information as to the competence of the shoe makers. He was also given no information about getting transport to and from any of the fifteen units, a pressing concern for someone with uneven legs. So, he phoned up and opted for his nearest unit (Colchester) which offered him a choice of two appointments six weeks apart, but was told to contact his GP about arranging transport.

His GP no longer arranges transport and he was given a number to ring (01206 742354) which he thinks might be an ambulance service but in any case couldn't offer him transport as he was outside their area. As Mr Beare, or Cake-space-Counter as he is now known, puts it; "Should I give up? Is it all a dream? At 78 I don't want all this aggro."

Neither, it appears, do many doctors. GPs have an ethical and legal duty to refer patients to safe, high quality services but neither they nor their patients are given any meaningful outcome data on which to base their choice. In the old system consultants could prioritise patients referred to them, but under Choose and Book it's up to the GP to prioritise the problem, which he or she may not feel able to do. An investigation by *Pulse* magazine found that electronic referrals do not always arrive in time for the appointment, or can't be opened, and that referral management centres are cancelling or diverting referrals deemed inappropriate.



*"It's a mixed ward – living **and** dead"*

Jeremy Fairbank, a consultant at the Nuffield Orthopaedic Centre NHS Trust described the system as "complex, expensive and unworkable". Jonathan Edwards, a professor at University College London, is having "every possible problem". Dr Paul Reilly, a rheumatologist at Frimley Park Hospital in Surrey, claimed that preferential treatment given to C&B patients meant "trivial problems are seen ahead of serious ones". And Dr Mark Pugh on the Isle of Wight has given up on the screening software as "it is a pain in the arse to use".

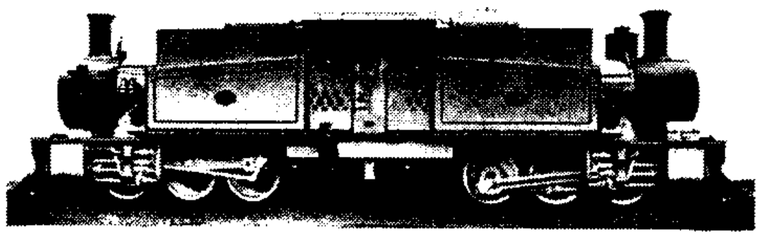
To be fair, some GPs, such as new Labour MP Howard Stoate, positively enjoy using Choose and Book, but the over-complicated transfer of power and responsibility to patients without adequate information or engagement of doctors could lead to depersonalisation, discontent and disaster. And it's no way to get a pair of orthopaedic shoes. Happy New Year.

M.D.

Number crunchings

£500m
■ NHS net deficit last year

£600m
■ NHS spending on management consultants last year



SIGNAL FAILURES

Gravy Train

THE mad merry-go-round of money in the railway system continues unabated with the taxpayer losing out yet again.

In the run-up to Christmas, Network Rail proudly boasted that it had made profits for the first time, chalking up £724m in the first six months of the current year. But since the company had benefited, one way or another, from an extra £975m in government grant, it can't have been too difficult for the company's overpaid executives (two of them, John Armitt, the retiring chief executive, and his deputy and successor Ian Coucher, getting around £1m including bonuses) to have achieved this sterling result.

Taken for a ride...

WHEN transport secretary Douglas Alexander announced the end of GNER's new franchise, he explained: "Rail operators that fall into financial difficulty should expect to surrender the franchise and not receive financial support. To do otherwise could set the precedent that we are willing to bail out operators at extra cost to the taxpayer."

Two days earlier, his department announced Virgin's west-coast mainline franchise had been, er, renegotiated with enormous unplanned subsidy. Over the next two years, Virgin will pocket around £300m per annum from taxpayers – when its franchise agreement says it should be paying over £150m (at 1997 prices) per annum to taxpayers.

To avoid admitting it had renegotiated, the government said it had "reinstated" a franchise suspended during the west-coast modernisation programme. It blamed Railtrack for that botched upgrade, overlooking that Virgin and Railtrack devised between them an upgrade they couldn't deliver. After £8.6bn of infrastructure work, Britain's busiest mainline has a top speed of just 125mph and the number of trains is still constrained by traditional signalling. That's a far cry from the 140mph fantasy railway, with late-20th-century signalling, that so impressed officials when Virgin bid for the franchise in 1997, promising to pay premiums because so many passengers would be attracted to the trains.

Competition between rail franchisees has proved impractical, yet franchising is still apparently worthwhile because competition for franchises guarantees best value. So how come Richard Branson's team got to renegotiate the west-coast franchise behind closed doors, and how does the government know it's not being taken for a ride when nobody else has been invited to show how they'd run the franchise with today's equipment?

Transport minister Tom Harris assured the public he'd struck "a better-value deal for the taxpayer". Strange. The National Audit Office reckons taxpayers "paid £590m more in subsidy to Virgin West Coast in 2002-06 than envisaged in its franchise agreement" (which promised no subsidy for 2002-06); Virgin's subsidy under the "better-value deal" will be nearly £1.3bn over five years.

While Virgin has only competed once for the west-coast franchise, the east-coast franchise has been up for grabs four times. The latest competition is being rushed through, officially because of GNER's "financial difficulty". Although GNER's parent company, Sea Containers, is bankrupt, the real problem is that GNER's business plan is so dire nobody else would take over. But it's best for the government not to elaborate on why GNER is on the way out, or people might start asking why the government, despite more than 10 years' experience of rail franchising, was foolish enough to accept its plan in the first place.

... And again

PASSENGERS have seen more evidence of government incompetence on the new First Great Western franchise. The government postponed consultation on FGW's future services until after it had given bidders the final specification (*Eye* 1135). When the proper consultation was held, FGW had so many angry responses it was forced to make major changes – but many idiocies slipped through. FGW's new timetable, launched last month, has been a dog's dinner of services axed, cancelled, delayed and overcrowded.

FGW's Glenda Lamont explained: "Some of these issues have arisen because of our own operational problems, others because we recognise elements of the timetable haven't met all customers' needs." Timetables could be changed in December 2007, but many people wanted a "quicker solution". Without promising anything, she added: "We have a team of people looking at what may be possible for early in the new year."

FirstGroup also bagged Thameslink, now First Capital Connect, in 2006 after former FirstGroup high-flier Mike Mitchell became government rail supremo. FCC boss Elaine Holt apologises to passengers in her winter newsletter: "Poor performance has at times been caused by First Capital Connect fleet issues, but greater impact has been caused by autumn adhesion problems (leaf fall) and Network Rail infrastructure issues." No apology yet though from the government for its part in any of these franchising nightmares.

'Dr B Ching'

ROTTEN BOROUGHS AWARDS 2006

THIS YEAR'S Rotten Boroughs Awards, the most prestigious event in the local government calendar, were presented at the Crispy Duck restaurant, Soho, where genial host "Bobby" Davis had kindly arranged a special late licence. After the ceremony, the party moved on to the Big Boy Club, where entertainment was provided by Simon Milton, whose Shirley Porter impersonations brought the house down, and Peter Walls, who came all the way from Sunderland to sing "My Way". Events came to a sudden conclusion when the doors were battered down by a crack team of Newham park-wardens, firing CS gas and bellowing "You're nicked, Sunshine!" and the revellers fled into the night.

Political Correctness Award: to Bristol city council, which in an apology for past Bristolians' part in the slave trade, spelled "Africa" and "Africans" throughout with a K, "because it is the preferred spelling among Afro-Caribbean communities and those who work with black and ethnic minority groups". Oh yeah? Runner-up: the Fire Brigades Union's black and ethnic minority executive council, which criticised Isles of Scilly council for not employing any black fire-fighters, even though hardly any black people live on the Scilly Isles and none applied to work in the fire service.

Money Down the Borehole: the States of Jersey, the Channel Island's legislature, spent £70,000 drilling holes to see if water diviners were right. Water diviners were wrong.

Appointment of the Year: Sunderland Labour councillor Tommy Wright, who was made vice-chair of the children's services review committee months after more than 4,000 adult hard core images were found on his council laptop – put there, he assured the council, by his grandchildren.

Slip of the Pen Award: "Stagecoach and the government have provided £972,000 to start the service under the Kickback project..." – How the Glenrothes Gazette reported the announcement of a new bus service to Edinburgh airport.

Tory Bigot of the Year: Hillingdon council leader Ray Puddifoot, who vetoed calling a new sports centre "The Queen's Athletics Centre" because it might "associate the centre with the gay community". Runner-up: former Brighton and Hove councillor Peter Willows, 75, who got drunk and suggested in front of gay activists at a council reception in May that most gay men were paedophiles.

Pointless Witch-Hunt Award: to the Crown Prosecution Service, for pressing a public order charge against Cllr Peter Willows (q.v.) after he suggested gay men were paedophiles. Willows was found guilty and given a conditional discharge by magistrates last month. He resigned as a councillor soon afterwards.

Most Deserved Prosecution: the "thoroughly dishonest" leader of the BNP group on Calderdale council, Richard Mulhall, who was convicted in October of falsely claiming £3,000 in benefits. Sentencing Mulhall to 200 hours community service last month, Recorder Felicity Davies said she regretted not being able to send him to prison: "You were cheating the very people who elected you."

Junketeers of the Year: Shetland councillors, who clocked up £100,000 expenses (and loads of CO_2 emissions) on foreign trips to, er, environmental conferences in the Caribbean, Madeira, Crete, Paris, Madrid, New York, etc etc.

Blue-Sky Thinking Award: to Isle of Wight chief executive Joe "Vera" Duckworth. In the hope that council senior officers would come up with better ideas, he made them wear baseball caps with the word "Thinking" on the front. "Thinking caps" – geddit?

Comeback of the Year: Skidrow-on-Sea Tories look unstoppable after selecting David Van Day, former member of naff 1980s pop groups Dollar and Buck's Fizz, and erstwhile burger van operator, to be a candidate at the May elections in Brighton and Hove.

Level Playing Field Award: to Doncaster council, which fined hard-up single mums for taking their children on holiday in term time, when it was cheaper. No such action, however, against Doncaster mayor Martin Winter, who has boasted of taking his children to the Glastonbury festival and international football matches during term time.

Litigant of the Year: Peter Walls, chief executive of the Sunderland Housing Group (SHG), who spent tens of thousands of pounds of tenants' money attempting to silence a website on which locals criticised the SHG's poor performance.

Housebuilder of the Year: Peter Walls, chief executive of the Sunderland Housing Group (q.v.), which in five years has demolished some 2,500 homes but built fewer than 300, of which only just over half are registered social housing.

Antisocial Behaviour Initiative of the Year: Bath and North-east Somerset council cracked down on binge drinking by ordering hairdressers to stop giving ladies a glass of wine while waiting for their perms.

Arse and Elbow Award: to the BNP's 11 dim-witted councillors in Barking and Dagenham, all but one of whom failed to back a measure they themselves had proposed because they had lost interest in the debate and weren't listening when the vote was called.

Non-Event of the Year: film star Brad Pitt turned out not to be designing the bar in Frank Gehry's shaky skyscraper development in Hove, despite all the newspapers and leading Skidrow-on-Sea councillors saying he was. Architect Gehry told *Newsweek* magazine that Pitt's involvement amounted to no more than having dropped into his office, once, and being photographed next to a model of the scheme: "From that day, I've never heard from him."

Cock and Bull Award: former Harlow Lib-Dem councillor Matthew Shepherd, discovered with scores of pictures of penises on his council laptop, claimed they were there to help him with serious research into the size of the male member. He said he was concerned, as holder of his party's health portfolio, that EU-approved condoms might not fit the men of Essex. He then sued the council over its "covert surveillance", claiming £35,000 under the Human Rights Act. He lost.

Send-off of the Year: Doncaster council observed a one-minute silence "as a mark of respect and remembrance" after the death of crooked former mayor Ray Stockhill, who had been convicted of taking bribes and fiddling his expenses during the "Donnygate" scandal.

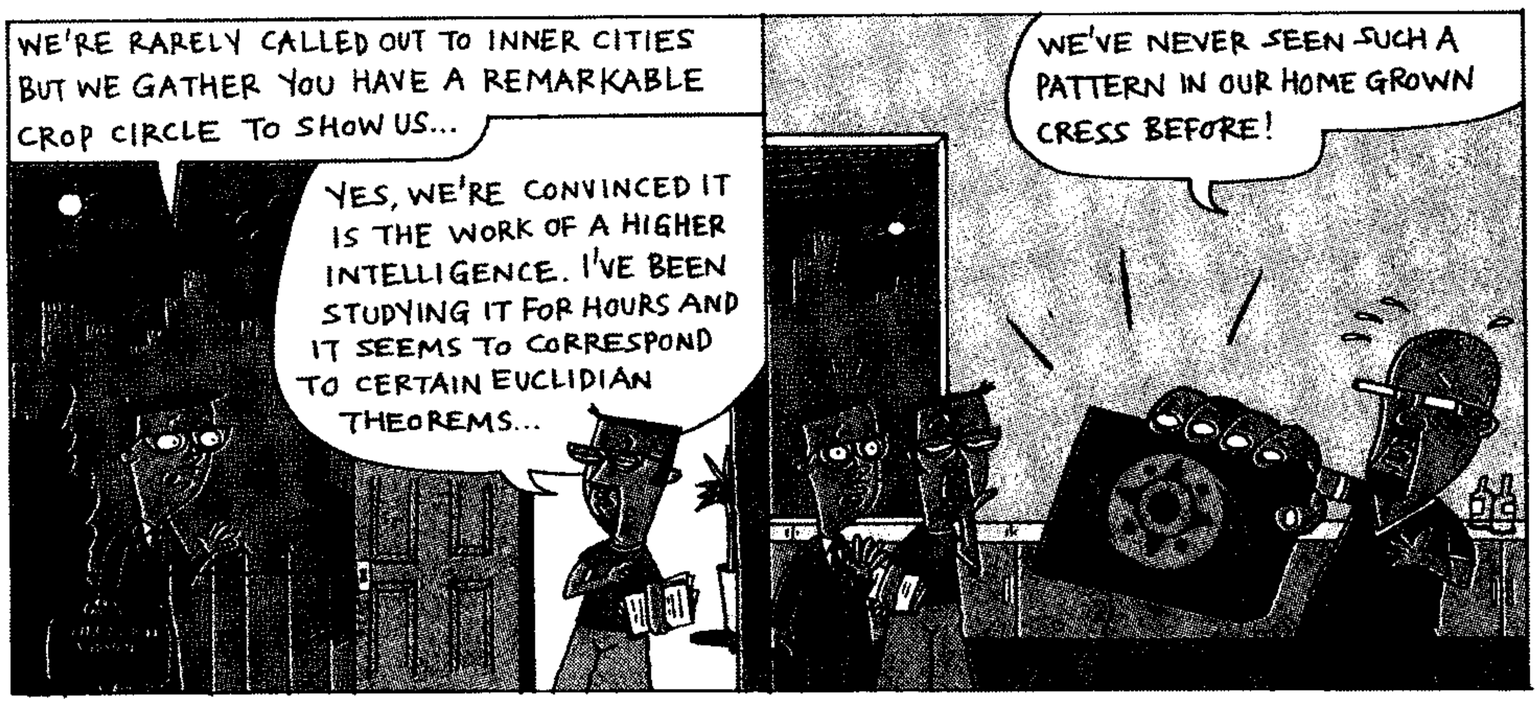
Plain English Award: to Newcastle city council, where a neighbourhood office is now referred to as a "corporate touchdown space".

Contract of the Year: Isle of Wight council gave the lead on a £13m contract for shoring up a crumbling coast road to engineering consultants High-Point Rendel without going through a proper tendering process. This was the same firm that featured in last year's Rotten Boroughs Awards over a similarly dodgy arrangement with Scarborough borough council. By a spooky coincidence, the man in charge of the Scarborough debacle, Derek Rowell, is now sea defences supremo at the Isle of Wight.

Sad Ad of the Year: "Stuck for a present? Birthday or anniversary or just to say 'Thank You'. Here's an idea. Enrol your relation or friend in Chelmsford Conservatives!" – Essex Tories' "In Touch" newsletter.

IT'S GRIM UP NORTH LONDON

KNIFE & PACKER


WE'RE RARELY CALLED OUT TO INNER CITIES BUT WE GATHER YOU HAVE A REMARKABLE CROP CIRCLE TO SHOW US...
YES, WE'RE CONVINCED IT IS THE WORK OF A HIGHER INTELLIGENCE. I'VE BEEN STUDYING IT FOR HOURS AND IT SEEMS TO CORRESPOND TO CERTAIN EUCLIDIAN THEOREMS...
WE'VE NEVER SEEN SUCH A PATTERN IN OUR HOME GROWN CRESS BEFORE!

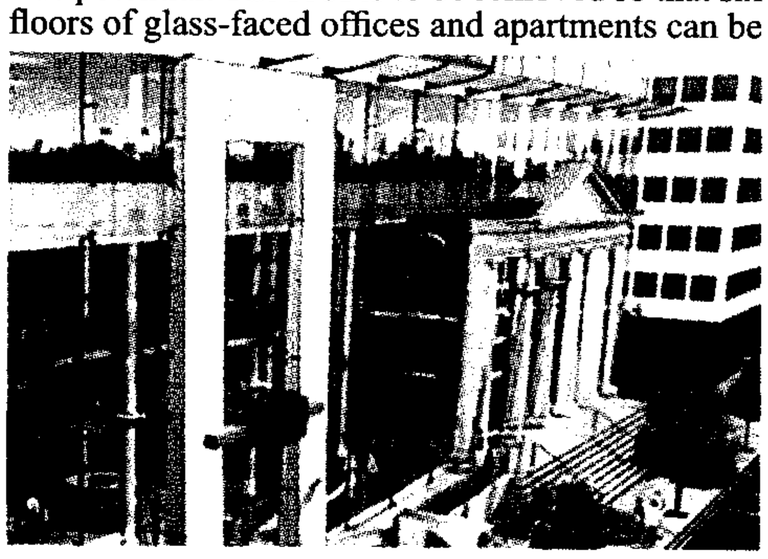
NOOKS and CORNERS

POOR ravaged Belfast doesn't have many Georgian buildings left. One that does survive, however, is particularly handsome: the May Street Presbyterian Church in the city centre.

Designed by William Smith in 1829, it has a fine Ionic portico, box-pews and twin curving staircases leading to a polished mahogany horseshoe-shaped gallery. The late lamented Sir Charles Brett, in his *Buildings of Belfast*, described the church as "a really handsome Palladian example of the Presbyterian taste for the solidly classical" which "represented the highest point of this admirable tradition".

It is a listed building and stands in a conservation area. Unfortunately, as the congregation's website announces, "we are at the forefront of urban regeneration in Belfast" and "May Street occupies a prime real estate location".

The answer, therefore, is clear. So that the church can have a "soft interface" with the surrounding community, "radical" plans have been worked up in conjunction with Barnabas Ventures Ltd and Mizpah Properties to realise the building's true potential. The roof is to be removed so that six floors of glass-faced offices and apartments can be



plonked on top, which will be supported on columns – pilotis indeed – which will run down in front of the side walls of the listed building. As for the church hall next door, designed by John Boyd, built in 1858-59 and also listed, this will be demolished to make way for two 19-storey glass towers. According to the minister, the Revd Keith Drury, this bold scheme will "open" the building "allowing people to enjoy the heritage of the past within the environment of today".

Barnabas Ventures informs us that its "vision" comes from scripture; that is, the Letter to the Hebrews, xi, verse 10: "looking forward to the city with foundations whose architect and builder is God". This strikes me as blasphemous, as God would surely make a rather better job of interpreting the brief. The crass mediocrity of this overweening scheme would all seem laughable if it wasn't so tragic – and a real possibility as planning permission is being sought. Needless to say, the proposals are being opposed by the Ulster Architectural Heritage Society, the Belfast Civic Trust and the Belfast Buildings Preservation Trust as well as by the London-based Historic Chapels Trust and the redoubtable Professor James Stevens Curl. As is so often the case with go-ahead visionaries with God on their side, the minister does not take kindly to opposition and he observes, in a shameful attempt to exploit our culture of political correctness, "I have been asking myself if people would be more guarded in their comments if this was a mosque".

Well, I can assure Mr Drury that this column is as happy to criticise Islamic vandals – as with the recent cases in Edinburgh and St Leonards (*Eyes passim*) – as it is to have a go at Presbyterian ones. Although his proposals are detrimental to the character of a conservation area and involve the demolition and mutilation of listed buildings (and will therefore damage the city of Belfast whose regeneration he affects to care about), Mr Drury insists that they are the only way forward and that the alternative is to sell up. The May Street Presbyterian Church would, of course, be eligible for a grant of Heritage Lottery money, but the congregation will not accept money derived from gambling. Given that the development scheme is intended to exploit the maximum commercial potential of the site, we can only assume that Mr Drury and his flock regard selfishness and greed as lesser sins.

SO MUCH for the past. In South Norwood, between London and Croydon, the name of William Ford Stanley (1829-1909) used to mean something. An inventor, architect, painter and photographer, he brought employment to the area and gave Stanley Halls to the community in 1903.

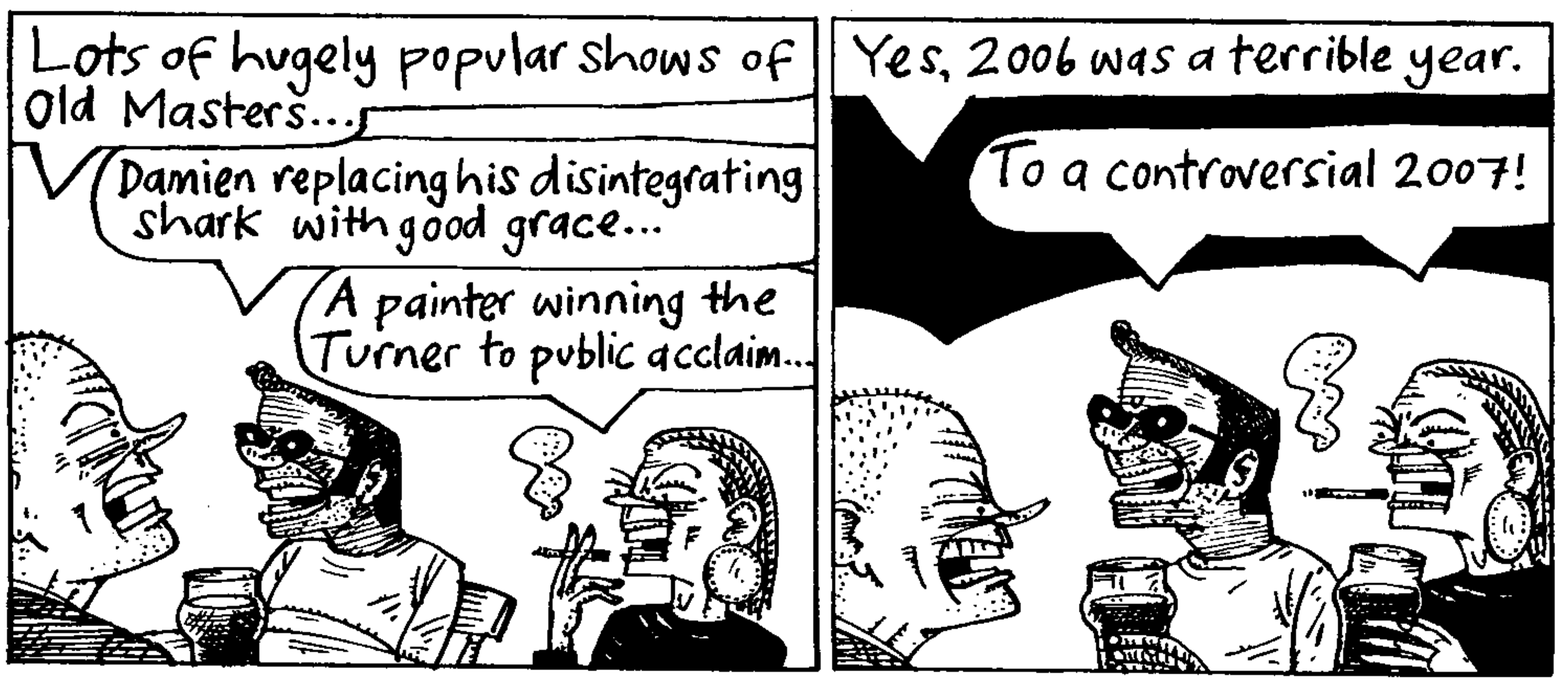
Now, however, his house has been suddenly demolished. Stanley built Cumberlow Lodge in Chalfont Road in 1878 and left it to the community to be used as a children's home. A century later, the local authority sold it to Fairview New Homes, which intends to build 152 flats on the site. This met with strong opposition, with local campaigners arguing that the original house could be converted into flats. Croydon Council was asked to put Cumberlow Lodge on the local list of buildings of architectural or historic interest (which has no legal force) and, on 22nd October, English Heritage was asked to consider it for spot listing. EH contacted Messrs Fairview on 30th November last to arrange a site visit.

Would William Stanley's house have been listable? We shall never know. On 2nd December, without any prior consultation or warning, Fairview New Homes demolished the original Victorian part of Cumberlow Lodge – and nothing else. It was a pre-emptive strike worthy of the late unlamented Nigel Broackes or Cardinal Winning (Eyes passim). In view of this shabby behaviour, the least Croydon Council can now do is refuse planning permission for Fairview's development. Will it dare?

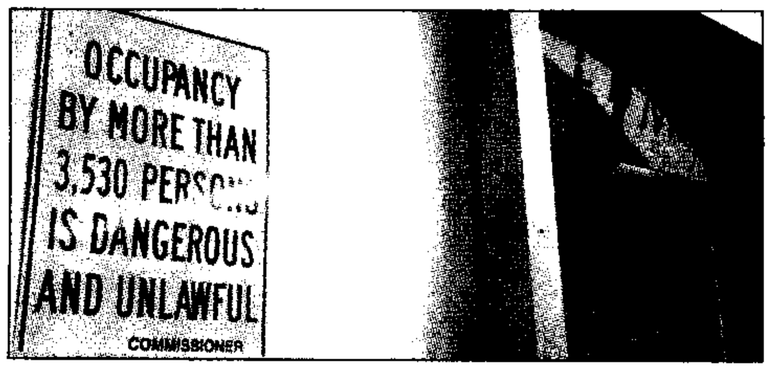
'Piloti'

YOUNG BRITISH ARTISTS

BY BIRCH


Lots of hugely popular shows of Old Masters...
Damien replacing his disintegrating shark with good grace...
A painter winning the Turner to public acclaim...
Yes, 2006 was a terrible year.
To a controversial 2007!

I-SPY *Staten Island, New York*



Submitted by Andy Jaeger. £10 paid for similar submissions. *(SAE required for return of photographs)*

MUSIC AND MUSICIANS

HAVING soundly trounced HM Government in 2006 for its unsporting attempts to tax orchestras out of existence, the British music lobby is limbering up for another scrap in 2007: this time over HMG's unsporting attitude to copyright law.

During December the ex-editor of the *FT*, Andrew Gowers, finally published his review of UK copyright, begun some 12 months earlier at the personal request of Gordon Brown. Its content ruined Christmas for an awful lot of UK musicians who were hoping it might have kept them in seasonal cheer into their dotage. Alas, this was not to be.

What the musicians were after was another 45 years of royalties on their recordings. As things stand in Britain, copyright on CDs and the like runs for 50 years. In North America it's 95 years, so the British music lobby wanted parity. And after some tough campaigning – led by old-timers in the pop business like Cliff Richard and the surviving Beatles, for whom the clock is ticking loudly – they thought they were going to get it. Sadly, Gowers thought otherwise; and though the government hasn't yet endorsed his findings, it is poised to do so – on the assumption that Cliff and the Beatles have earned quite enough money from their discs and are unlikely to pull much public sympathy in their demands for more.

But as always in these arguments, it's the lesser-earning classical artists who end up the real losers – the ones who earned, perhaps, a fair amount but nowhere near enough to live on through retirement. So the International Federation of Phonographic Industries is rustling up a new campaign that speaks for *them*. Beefed up with special pleading from the likes of Renee Fleming, the Vienna Philharmonic and the ghostly voice of Dame Elisabeth Schwarzkopf speaking from the grave (before her death last year she was persuaded to draft a sort of begging letter), it's a declaration of war that takes the matter above the heads of HMG to Brussels. And lest all this money-talk sound vulgar on the lips of serious artists, it's been camouflaged with other, more artistic issues. The Vienna Philharmonic's deposition dreams of "protecting [our] rich musical heritage". And Fleming waffles nicely about recordings as a package of quality-controlled sound, sleeve notes and cover design, all of which goes out of the window when copyright expires and the recording itself can be re-issued by anyone, subject to no control.

More to the point, though, is that our copyright laws are so untidy. Why should recordings be protected only for 50 years from the date of creation when the actual music is covered for the life of the composer plus 70 years? Or when literary works under the Berne Convention are covered for the life of the author plus 50 years? The IFPI's best argument is surely that, despite a year of turning soil, the Gowers review just doesn't dig deep enough to be useful. And if being useful means boosting Cliff Richard's offshore retirement fund as well as the building society balance of your average oratorio singer, too bad.

'Lunchtime O'Boulez'

Letters

Assisting enlargement

Sir,

With the anticipated enlargement of the European Union, I wonder whether you have any pictures which demonstrate the UK's commitment to spreading liberal democracy in Romania?

Yours faithfully,
PHILIP WHITTINGTON

Worcester Park, Surrey.

Sir,

"As the British immigration service continues forcibly to deport the most innocent-looking people, why exactly are the Cheeky Girls still here"? (Eye 1174, Immigration Special).

"Gabriela Irimia, of pop duo The Cheeky Girls, has spoken for the first time of her relationship with MP Lembit Opik" (BBC news website, 19/12/06, widely reported elsewhere).

Could these two be in any way related?

Yours,
DOUGLAS BILTON,

Farringdon, EC1.

Sir,

I notice that the noble Lembit Opik MP has ridden to the rescue of the Cheeky Girls in their immigration predicament (Eye 1174). I can't help feeling that his uncanny ability at offering assistance to those in need (Charles Kennedy, Mark Oaten) might not be quite what they were looking for.

Yours with plenty of cheek,
JAMES HAMILTON,

Bedford.

Cole Fired

Sir,

I did not "leak" the Queen's Christmas message in 1987. Remarks I made in private conversation at an off-the-record royal reporters' lunch were used by Andrew Morton as the basis of his lead story in the following day's Daily Star. This was without my knowledge and to my great regret.

My criticism of the Metropolitan Police for leaking, 10 days before its publication, the Stevens report into the killing in Paris of Diana, Princess of Wales and Dodi Al Fayed, on 31 August 1997, has nothing to do with what happened to me a decade earlier. It is too much to expect the police to conform to minimum standards of public probity? And anyway, why are you acting as apologist for the Met?

I retired from Harrods in March (not February) 1998 for the reason I stated at the time. I turned 55 that month, the earliest age at which it is possible to take pensioned retirement, in order to set up my own public relations consultancy, which I have been running ever since.

My hair is not "pompadoured". It grows as it does without help or encouragement. It is true, however, that I have more hair than the editor of this magazine. He was nearly bald the last time I saw him and displaying a worrying tendency to have his remaining strands combed forwards, like Nero.

Yours faithfully,
MICHAEL COLE,

Chairman, Michael Cole & Co. Ltd, London SW7.

Old and bold

Sir,

Unlike Mr Tim Hall (Letters, Eye 1173) I appreciate very much "Piloti's" criticism of Richard Rogers and Norman Foster. Both these architects as they grow old have chosen to attempt to push the boundaries of post-modernism even more than in the past and regrettably practice their craft closer to home. Piloti is fully justified in being prejudiced in favour of older and quite frankly more aesthetically pleasing buildings, especially those which are endangered by the kind of architecture Mr Hall obviously likes.

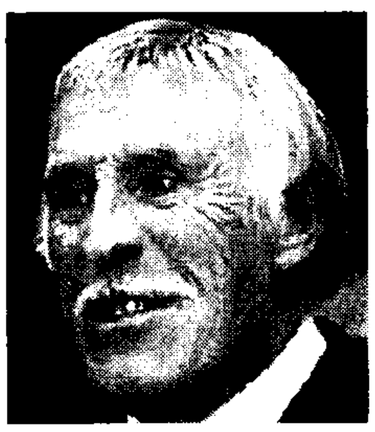
King George V as a mad monarch? Criminality of British World War I generals? The Cenotaph as designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens is an amazingly simple, powerful, solid monument to the nation's sacrifice, and before making libellous comments about the British military leadership Mr Hall would do well to actually study the expansion of the British Army from a garrison force to the most powerful military force in the world. The immense change in the nature of land warfare in a four-year span is a challenge which would be lucky to be as well-met today.

The Cenotaph will stand for far longer than many Rogers and Foster buildings and will still be here when Mr Hall, Piloti and myself won't be. Does that say something?

Yours sincerely,
SIMON HARLEY,

Workington, Cumbria.

Lookalike



Albert Steptoe

Bruce Forsyth

Sir,

Are they perhaps related?
JOHN QUICK

Via email

Special friends

Sir,

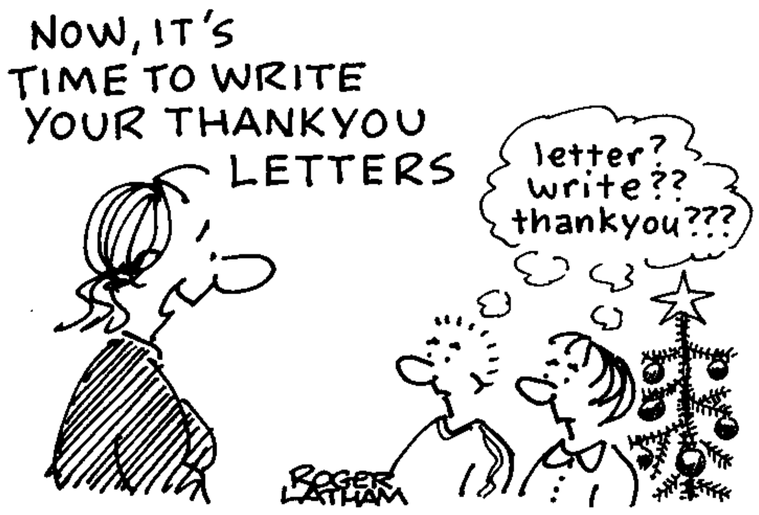
Of course businessmen in the European Services Forum had special access to EU trade negotiators, especially if Roger Liddle denies it. (Eye 1174).

He denied similar allegations during the "Lobbygate" scandal in New Labour's first term, despite being caught in the act.

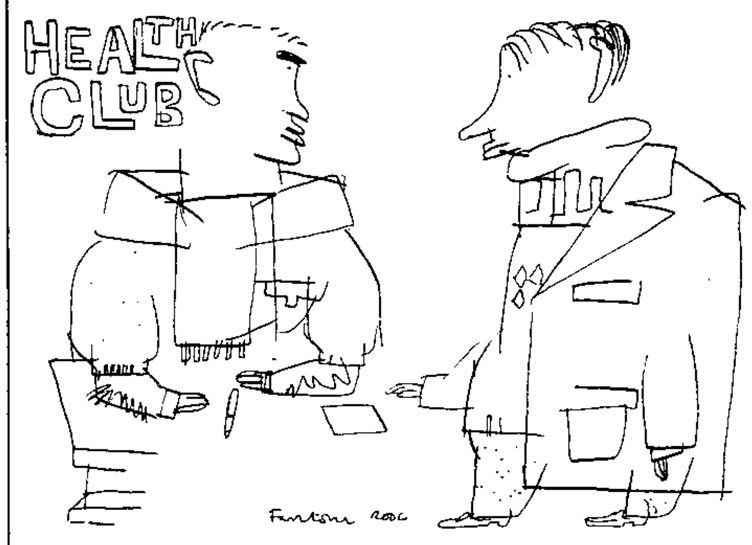
Liddle and his political master, Mandelson, go back a long way together. They both served as Labour councillors in Lambeth. Liddle eventually jumped ship and led the SDP group on the council. Mandelson was expected to jump too, but changed his mind. They were inseparable then, they are inseparable now.

NOEL HANNON

South London



Scenes You Seldom See



"It costs £150 to join and then £200 a month. But you can get the same results for nothing by just running up and down stairs"

Citizzzzzenship

Sir,

We were deeply amused at the thought of being caught asleep at the recent Education and Skills Select Committee Inquiry into citizenship education (Gavel Basher, 1174), alas we have to admit it wasn't us on this occasion.

Good citizenship education engages people critically in politics; rather than "formalising respect for government systems" or "moulding young people's opinions", as Basher suggests. It enables young people to bring a healthy scepticism to all things political – something that the Eye has done with aplomb for many years.

TONY BRESLIN,

Chief Executive, Citizenship Foundation, London EC1.

Meat and two veggies

Sir,

Derek Greatrex (Letters, 22nd December) trots out the usual Veggie propaganda about land used to produce meat being able to support more people if used to produce grain for human consumption. The huge assumption he makes, of course, is that all land, of any type, can produce crops! Traditional methods of meat (and milk) production in fact used land that could not produce crops – mountains, forests, moorlands, semi-desert, even seashores. It is only modern, intensive methods of meat production that feed grain to animals, which is self-evidently not sustainable. That is, however, a criticism of the method of production, not of meat-eating itself. Modern, intensive methods of producing grains and vegetables cause huge environmental damage – soil erosion, fertiliser run-off into rivers and seas, draining of rivers and aquifers for irrigation – but those, again, are problems of methods, not reasons for not eating grains and vegetables.

Yours sincerely,
RONALD N. B. CAMPBELL,

Pitlochry, Perthshire.

Brenda's blog

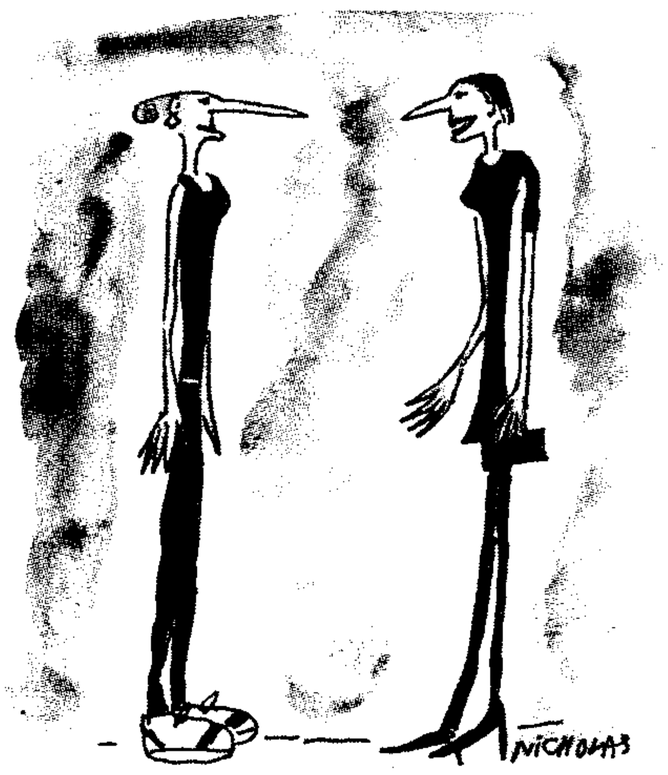
Sir,

With reference to the Knife & Packer cartoon on p.30 of Eye 1173, I feel real life has finally undone satire (again?). The traditional Christmas message was available as a podcast from the Monarchy's official website for free on 25th December at 1500.

Or who knows, maybe Brenda got the idea from the pages of your very organ.

Regards,
ANTONY SHEFFIELD,

Via email.



"Oh just like yours – sherry, loads of mince pies, mountains of turkey, bread sauce, stuffing, pud and endless chocolates"

Asleep at the wheel?

Sir,

I read with interest the observations of your Rotten Boroughs correspondent on the subject of Richmond Council's ill thought-out plan to treble the cost of parking permits for residents with thirsty cars and 4x4s (Parking Kermits, Eye 11 74).

However, I feel obliged to point out that there isn't a single car that passes through the borough "on main roads... such as the A3" because there isn't a single inch of the A3 that passes through the borough!

I suspect your correspondent meant to refer to the A316 trunk road which carries thousands of vehicles per hour for several miles from the end of the M3 motorway at Whitton, all the way to Chiswick Bridge.

Yours smugly (no parking permit required where I live!),

PAUL N. BLEZARD MSC.

Richmond, Surrey.

Director debit

Sir,

As Chief Exec of the Public Fundraising Regulatory Association (www.pfra.org.uk) – the organisation which regulates "charity muggers" – may I thank you for your sympathetic portrayal of them in, and "Happy Ending" to, "A Grim Christmas Carol" over the last two editions (1173/4). May Jezbenezer's conversion from ignorant rudeness to kind curiosity (and, hopefully, willingness to give) be an inspiration to all your readers, not just in the "Season of Goodwill" but throughout the year ahead.

Regards,

MICK ALDRIDGE,

London SE1.

Bishop 'thrill'

Sir,

Chess players are, by definition, pedantic. So it gives me a rather perverse and worrying thrill to be able to point out to you that, as the Bishop in the chess problem on page 21 of Issue 1174 is a black Bishop, the square you identify as KR8 should be named from black's point of view as KR1. Alternatively, you could have named the square correctly, in a way that anyone who's looked at a chess book since the 1970s would have understood, as h8, in modern algebraic notation.

I know, I know. Trust me, I have asked for a life for Christmas.

Regards,

JASON CAREY,

London W3.

Level thy neighbour

Sir,

Dr Summers' assertion that "the Jewish State does not attack those who believe in the divinity of Christ" (Eye 1174) must have come as some surprise to the thousands of Christians who live in Lebanon, Palestine, Jordan, Syria etc who have been routinely shelled, bombed, shot at and invaded for nearly 60 years... perhaps as she works in a library she might consider making some attempt to educate herself before pontificating.

Or on the other hand, just get a sense of humour, love.

Regards,

ROBERT DOWNIE,

Via email.

Caulk it

Sir,

Lawrence Attrill ("Cork It", Letters, Eye 1174) refers to we Islanders as "Corkheads". As any Island-born fule kno, we actually refer to ourselves as "Caulkheads", a term derived from the use of caulk (a mixture of rope and tar) as a means of plugging the gaps between the planks of wooden boats, such as those that have been built on the Island since God was a boy!

Regards,

PAUL DIBBENS,

East Cowes, IoW.

Lookalike

Jabba the Hut

Pinochet

Sir,

Has anyone noticed the startling resemblance between the late greedy slimy malevolent and unlamented presence feared throughout the universe and the late Generalissimo of Tatooine?

JAMES ELSTON

Via email

Colemanballs

£10 paid for contributions

"Andy Johnson's gone 11 goals without a game..."

NIGEL WINTERBURN, Football First
(Lewys Ball)

"Fourth spot is what we are aiming for... we don't want to be second best."

PHIL NEVILLE, Sky Sports
(Robert Bamberger)

"Ronnie is one of the greatest ever players but he is going to have to win some more competitions before he will be considered one of the greatest ever."

JOHN VIRGO, BBC
(Joseph Brewer)

"Later on we'll be talking to Zara Phillips, who won this year's Horse of the Year award."

ANDY TOWNSEND, Talk sport Radio
(Mike Charalambous)

"The council will probably draw a blind eye over it."

Legal expert, BBC1
(Jennie Whitefield)

SOLUTIONS

"The Financial Services Business within Logica CMG is now looking to recruit Solution Architects" – *IT support workers*

"Besam makes life easier for everyone who can benefit from safe, convenient and reliable entrance solutions" – *doors*

"B&Q Room Solutions" – *fitted kitchens*

"Flooring Solutions, Alfreton" – *carpet shop*

"Amtrak: quality-driven overnight delivery and collection solutions throughout the UK and abroad" – *couriers*

All submitted by readers

Alpha males

Sir

Bryn Glover (Letters, Eye 1174) should burn his anorak in shame. There are plenty of detectors which can "directly pick up alpha rays" in widespread use throughout the nuclear industry. The range of alpha particles is a few cm in air and with careful use an alpha probe can easily detect the particles – in fact typical alpha probes are twice as efficient as beta probes. The technique Mr Glover describes, known as liquid scintillation counting, will detect alpha and beta particles but take very expensive counters and time to prepare whereas using the probe will give a result there & then.

I too could give a fuller explanation (thanks to my MSc in Radiation & Environmental Protection) but won't. However I must thank Mr Glover for reminding me to finish reading the most excellent issue 1173 – the funniest issue of the year.

Regards and have a safe New Year,
PHIL AHMET, RPA (that's Radiation Protection Advisor, not Anorak),
Emerson's Green, Bristol.

Helmet reprimand

Sir,

In defence of your cartoonists I wish James Reeve would desist from his misinformed comments regarding the accuracy of their work, if you are going to set yourself up as an authority on uniforms you should at least look at more than one book and provide the correct information when you do so as only one of his five assertions is correct. There is ample photographic evidence of the WWI German tunic having breast pockets (Prussian Fusilier Guards 1916, 1st Bavarian Ski Battalion 1915, Wuttermburg Mountain Rifle Battalion 1917 etc). British troops were first issued with the steel helmet for trials in late 1915, so whilst they would not be in keeping with the 1914 Christmas Truce their inclusion would be plausible for the less numerous 1915 cross-trench festivities. Some British snipers had netting on their helmet. With regard to the Picklhaube/ Stahlhelm debate it was possible to remove the fitting on top of the Picklhaube so in profile it would resemble a Stahlhelm.

Hope you all have a peaceful New Year, I must get out more.

JON BOWD,

Brackley.

Peerage
Fantastic low prices here.
Feed your passion on eBay.co.uk!
www.ebay.co.uk
Google

Special Letter from Prison

Sir,

Your piece on Wormwood Scrubs (Eye 1174) which quoted from my review, merits some comment.

First, it overstates things to say that abuse was from "a hard core of 164 officers". Some were only peripherally involved, for example by witnessing but not reporting assault or, in one case, improperly but in frustration, throwing a bar of soap at a prisoner. However, almost 40 officers were each involved in assaulting three or more prisoners, often on many occasions.

Secondly, I am pleased that Lord Ramsbotham is asking questions in the House, thus keeping the issue live. He should learn that far from disciplinary actions being taken against the governor in charge of the prison for most of the time, he was promoted to area manager with oversight of Wormwood Scrubs. He was eventually "leaned upon" to take early retirement as the brutality of his hidden regime slowly came to public notice.

It may not be much help simply to ask how many senior managers remain in service. Some who remain are those whose courageous attempts to ameliorate things led to a campaign of personal vilification characterised by attacks on their property, qualifications or sexuality. Further, by asking who still works for NOMS allows scope to mislead. Some of the doctors, for example, who consistently failed to notice injuries or to process prisoner complaints, may still work in prisons but now under the aegis of the Department of Health as part of a transfer of responsibilities. They no longer work for NOMS.

You mention four reports released to Daniel Machover who acted for most of the prisoners. In fact, my co-author and I wrote one of six reports on different aspects of the Wormwood Scrubs of the day and we were told that there would be a further investigation of the doctors. We also turned up a submission to ministers on the accountability of those at Prison Service Headquarters. Further, there was the disturbing inquest into the death of John Boyle who was found hanging in his cell and who had injuries inconsistent with hanging. There was no Prison Service investigation into this suicide, as there should have been. This becomes all the more sinister in the context of those whose cases I reviewed, who had been threatened that they would be hanged by staff who said they had got away with it before. One prisoner misheard them to say that the prisoner they had killed was "John Ball".

There were many more allegations of staff brutality that fell outside my terms of reference. These were where prisoners made their civil claims out of time or where they had been unable to obtain sufficient public funding for their litigation. One of the latter was of assault on a visitor to a prisoner. Further, the number and variety of reports into Wormwood Scrubs means that there is a jigsaw of which nobody holds all the pieces. This really must argue for the public or other official inquiry my review recommended. The Prison Service must lean how its former "flagship prison" degenerated into the third world regime it became if only so that this can be avoided in the future.

Yours sincerely,
PETER QUINN
(former prison governor and co-author of Wormwood Scrubs: review of civil litigation*)*

North Yorks.

TESCO value

this product may contain smoked, unsmoked and sweetcure back bacon

Back Bacon Rashers

FUNNY OLD WORLD

COMPILED BY **VICTOR LEWIS-SMITH**

● "It's true that having sex with an animal is illegal in Wisconsin," public defender Frederic Anderson told a court in Douglas County, "but the statute does not prohibit people from having sex with a damned carcass. When my client, Bryan James Hathaway, found the deer on Stinson Avenue, it had very recently died, so the fact he had sex with it is irrelevant. It was legally no longer an animal, so the sex act wasn't a crime, and the charge of 'sexual gratification with an animal' should be dismissed."

In reply, Judge Michael Lucci remarked "I'm surprised this issue has never arisen before in a previous case. Webster's dictionary defines 'animal' as 'any of a kingdom of living beings,' so clearly a dead deer does not fall into that category. If you include carcasses in that definition, you would go down a slippery slope with absurd results. And it seems to me that the only clear point to draw a line between an animal and a carcass is the point of death."

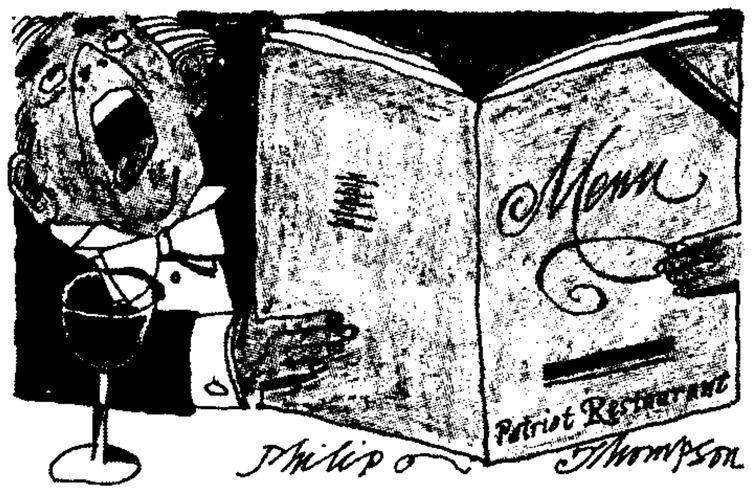
However, Assistant District Attorney James Boughner challenged the notion that a dictionary should determine the meaning of a word. "The common and ordinary meaning of a word can be found in how people actually use it, and when a person's dog dies, they still refer to their dog as a dog, not as a carcass. In ordinary usage, it stays a dog for some time. Similarly, the freshly-killed deer that Mr Hathaway used for his sexual gratification was a deer, not a carcass. It did not lose its essence as an animal when it died, and the sex act was therefore illegal."

Judgement in the case was reserved. *(Duluth News Tribune, 16/11/06. Spotter: Steven Walker)*

– ● –

● *PEARL OF CZECH GASTRONOMY. The best cuisine out of Czech country and national history. Prepared with maximum attention in a modern way and in x variations.*

Our ancestry art almost charming derive benefit from in kitchen all moderate producers his country. Magic flowers, spring browse, seeding, garden-stuff, venison, paste economic animals, but also native delicatessen like sausage and smoke-dried, milk and cheese, fowls, fish, crayfish. Frogs, snail, truffles, mushrooms, beer, wine, honey, maple syrup, cereals, and next raw materiale and stimulant, it everything molding rootage Czech kitchen. Very adroitly exploited to resurgence his bill of fare too offers incoming businessman. On desks nobility so detect already behind Carla IV expensive spice, southern fruit, sea food and his next fruits, rare vina, extra delicatessen. Together with native raw material and these stimuli extraneous put the finishing touches to character of our kitchen and we thanks



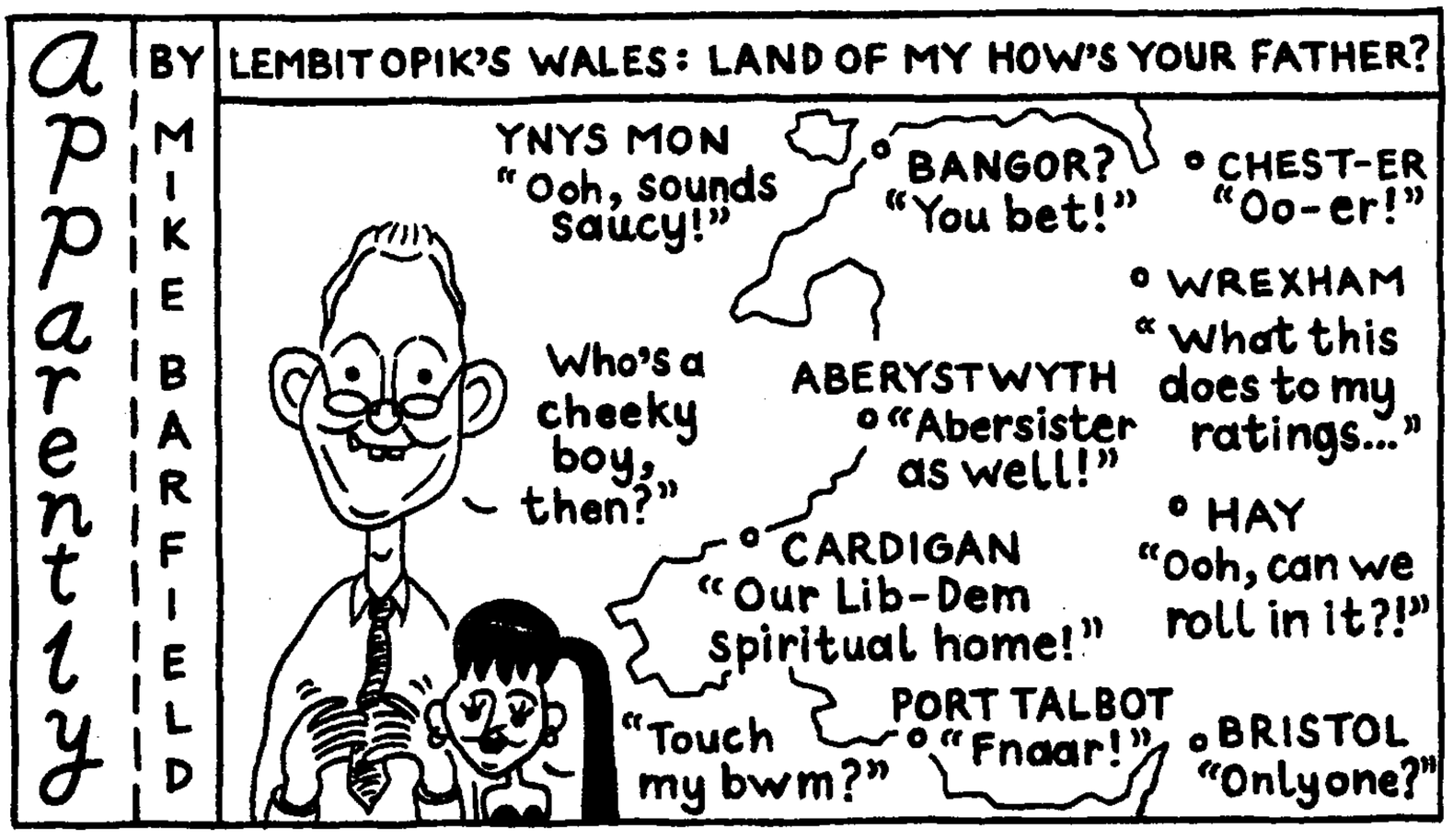
gourmet be in a position Czech aristocratic kitchen taste. Experience beautiful moment fair weather above gay offers delicatessen and resurgence culture Czech gastronomy.

Bon appetit! (Menu of Patriot restaurant, Prague. Spotter: Quentin Kaye)

– ● –

● "Charles Sibindana is not a bad man or a stupid man," his lawyer told a court in Vereeniging near Johannesburg, "but he is an uneducated man. So when he asked his employers for a week off work, and they told him he would need a sick note from a doctor, he decided to steal his girlfriend's medical certificate. He could read the words 'Health Centre' on the certificate, but did not know what a gynaecologist is, so he had no idea that these are doctors who only a woman would consult. Which is how he came to be arrested, after changing the name on the certificate, handing it in to his boss, and claiming a paid week off work for being pregnant."

After fining Sibindana the sum of 1,000 rand, Magistrate Bruno van Eeden warned him against pursuing a life of crime. "You are somewhat pathetic, but you are not a career criminal, so you should pay only half the fine now. The other half will be due only if you commit another crime within the next five years. This is probably the most absurd case I have ever presided over, in all my years as a magistrate, but I must warn you please not to walk around faking any more sick notes from gynaecologists. It is such a basic error that real criminals will laugh at you." *(Afrol News, 28/11/06. Spotter: Anon)*



ST ALBION PARISH NEWS

Incumbent: Rev A.R.P. Blair MA (Oxon)

Hullo,

And a very happy 2007 to you all (or happy 1365 to our Moslem readers!).

I know that many of you will be making your New Year resolutions.

Some of you will be hoping to lose weight – no names, John, but wouldn't it be a good idea to lose a few stone before you get taken off to the cottage hospital to become a burden on our overstretched public services? – not that they are overstretched of course, unlike your stomach, no offence John, but you really are grossly over weight, and you don't lose any of it by playing croquet(!), not to mention groping your secretary at the Christmas party, no offence again, John, but if the cap fits wear it! Although in your case it won't fit because you're so fat!

(Are you sure you want all of this to go in? Ed.)

Others may resolve to be less grumpy in this coming year, not to mention more grateful for their forthcoming promotion, when we all know that they were lucky not to lose their job after years of adding up the parish accounts wrongly!

Remember the old saying in the Good Book, "Smile and the world smiles with you, frown and you're Gordon Brown"! *(Book of Proverbs, 12.4)*

And there will be those who will struggle, perhaps in vain, to keep their New Year resolutions for very long!

One cannot imagine Mr Marshall-Andrews, for instance, managing to abstain from alcohol for more than a few minutes!

And that might be longer than certain other former members of the PCC who I won't embarrass by mentioning by name (although their drunken rants against the vicar make it pretty clear that Mrs Short may have some idea who I am referring to?).

"But what about you?" I can hear our friend from Tesco calling out, as he piles his trolley high with *Nigella's Oven-ready Parsnips Covered in Goose Fat Meal-for-One* and a bottle of Tesco's own brand whisky to wash it down!

"What are your resolutions for 2007, vicar?" he calls out to me. "Are you going to keep your word and actually resign, like you said you would? It would be a world-first!"

Well, let me spell out to our rude friend, and indeed to all of you, just what my resolution is for the coming year.

It is to ignore all the petty criticism that is constantly being thrown at me from all sides, not just when I'm in Tesco, but wherever I go, at home or abroad!

It just seems that everyone can't wait to tell me I've got it all wrong in everything I do. Even when I stand by the Rev. Dubya in his great crusade against the recently hanged Evil One (not of course that I was in favour of hanging him, although it was, frankly, the right thing to do!).

And it's not just big issues that they go on about! No, it's silly little piddling things, like where I and my wife choose to go on holiday, and whether or not I choose to pay for it!

Those are the things that I propose to ignore!

But before I do, let me make one or two things absolutely clear. When Cherie and I wanted to spend a few days in the sunshine at the house of our friend Mr Gibb, we did so entirely at our own expense.

We paid out of our own pocket for the mini-cab which took us to the airport. It was Cherie who paid for the coffee we had in the departure lounge.

I could go on! But I hope this will be enough to prove for once and for all that those people who accuse us of taking freebies from our rich friends have no idea what they are talking bout.

It is precisely this kind of malicious sniping, based on no more than empty tittle-tattle, that I am firmly resolved to turn my back on in the coming New Year.

So when people say that we don't pay our own way the only thing I will **pay** is no heed to what they say! (And that's my own joke – unlike Mr Cameron I don't have to pay a team of script writers to come up with those silly jokes about the vicar with which he tries to get a laugh from his new 'hoody' friends down at the youth club!).

Which brings me to my fifth and final point, i.e. I am wishing you all a happy New Year, and if you want to wish me one back, that's entirely up to you. I frankly don't care!

Yours,

Tony

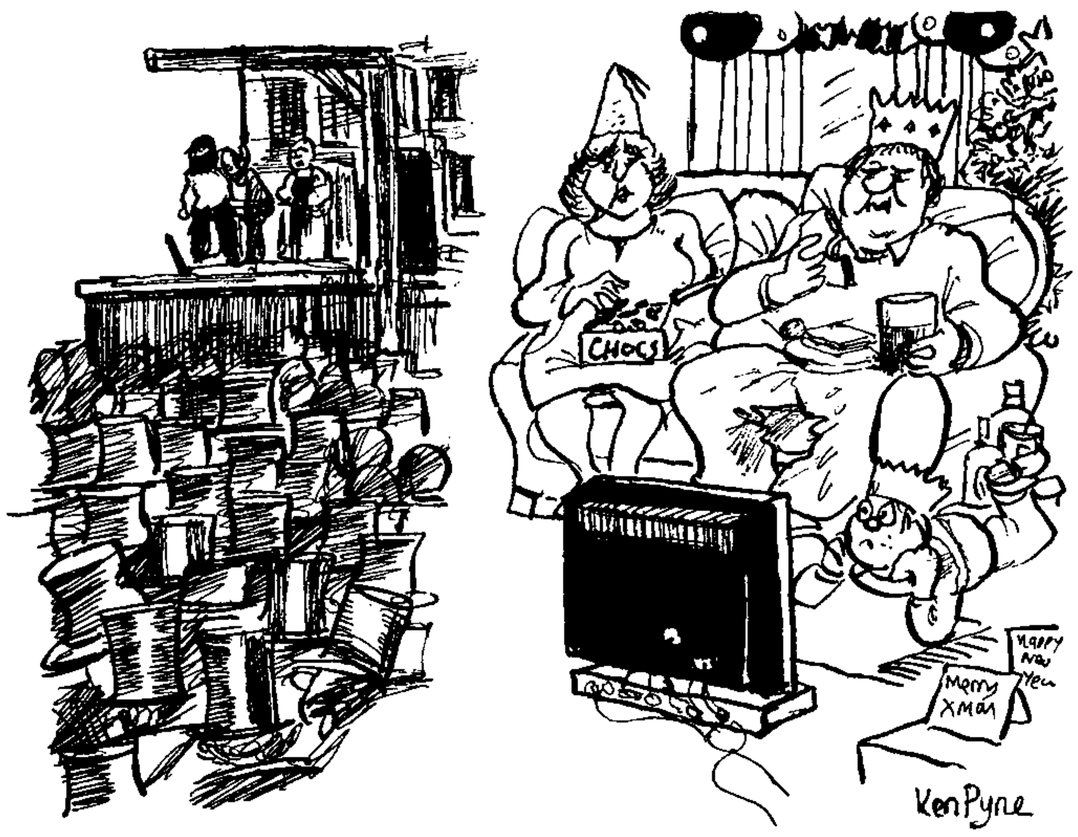
To Remember In Your Prayers

● Mrs Blears, who seems to have over-indulged in the sherry trifle and was seen taking part in a 'demo' to stop the closure of our local maternity clinic. Let us pray that Mrs Blears may remember her position as chair (temporary) of the PCC. If she wants to go on a demo, when she's had too much brandy butter, she should make sure that it's a demo in favour of the vicar, and not some silly childish protest at Mrs Hewitt's very sensible and carefully worked out plans to save money by closing down all our local facilities. May she remember what happens to middle-aged women who start criticising the vicar thanks probably to their over-fondness for the liqueur chocolates! Mrs Mowlem would have known who I had in mind if she was still with us, which she isn't! T.B.

A Message From The Rev. Dubya Bush (as recorded on the vicarage voicemail)

Yo, partner! New Year greetings to you and your good lady, Cherylene! And what a great Christmas present! That lowdown stinkin' coyote El Bandido de Baghdad swinging from the highest bough of the highest tree in Iraqiland! Me and the boys were there in spirit, a-pullin' on that rope and cheerin' as he breathed his last! Yes, Sirree! We was drinkin' our shots of rye and firing our six-guns into the chandeliers of the salon! And get this straight, we don't want to hear from any lily-livered do-gooders in Englandland who don't know how to enjoy a good lynchin' when one comes along. Shame on you all! We're doin' the Lord's work here, and you should have been helpin' us to build the scaffold, Tiny Bloom, instead of skulking away behind the skirts of your good lady like a whelping dog that just ate a wasp! So, watch yourself, Blair-boy, or I'll be takin' away your deputy's badge and givin' the tin star to somebody with some guts.

Signed, Rev. John Wayne,
The White Ranch, Texas.



"Going to see a man hanged" – *Thackeray*, 1840

Staying in to see a man hanged – 2007

STAR-STUDDED LINE-UP FOR NEW YEAR'S HONOURS

Lord Shaking of Stevens (popular singer, for services to the Popular Singing Industry)

Sir Dodgy Dossier (Chief of Secret Intelligence, for services to the Sexing-Up Industry)

Johnny Soap (soap actor, for services to the Soap-Acting Industry)

Lord Orchid of Aintree (horse, posthumous award for services to the Racing Community)

Sir Eugene Sue (senior partner of Messrs Sue, Grabbit and Runne, for services to the Libel Industry)

Dr House OBE (American Doctor, for services to Medicine)

Zara Boomdeay-Phillips MBE (member of the Royal Family, for services to the Royal Family)

Stevie Scouser (football worker, for services to the Penalty-Missing Community)

(continued from page one) for services to the On-line Dating Industry, Nuneaton; **Mrs Agnes Starborgling**, services to Mobile Libraries, Isle of Sheppey; **Mrs Gulam Chapati**, services to the Call Centre Industry, Bangalore;

CBBC

R.B.F. Jobsworth, Health and Safety Officer, Milton Keynes Safety Advisory Outreach Programme; **Mr Edward Cringer**, Assistant Under Secretary to the Ministry of Ministries; **Mr Colin Penpusher**, NHS Auxilliary Food Support Agency, Barrow-in-Furness;

Order of George Michael

Sir Quentin Moustache, Egg-Boiler Rampant to the Prince of Wales; **Sir Tobias Hornby-Crutchford**, Toothpaste Extractor Poursuivant to the Prince of Wales; **Dame Penelope Twinset**, Keeper of The Royal Wellingtons (Highgrove) to the Duchess of Cornwall;

British Empire Medal

Peter Cook Islands

Mr Gabriel D. Wisty, Assistant Walrus Attendant, Turtle Beach; **Mrs E.L. Spiggot**, Deputy Turtle Attendant, Walrus Beach; **Mr Derek Clive**, Senior Walrus and Turtle Attendant, Killer Bee Beach.

Order of the Baathist

KP

The late **Mr S. Hussein**, for services to the Murder and Torture Industries *(Is this right? Ed.)*

HOW APPALLING DO YOU THINK THESE SADDAM PICTURES ARE?

THE DAILY GNOME wants *you* to tell us how shocked and horrified you are as you sit there staring at these indefensible images of a human being suffering the ultimate indignity.

Do you think:

a) They should never have been taken

b) They should never have been published

c) They should never have been looked at by civilised human beings

Judge for yourself by turning to pages 1-94 of our special Saddam Supplement for more terrible pics or send for your free DVD of "The Last Hours of the Monster" (with special execution out-takes feature and commentary by Michael Winner).

DON'T HANG ABOUT – RING US NOW ON 08997 787526325 (calls cost only £10.99 per minute) and make your protest heard.

A Taxi Driver writes

EVERY week a well-known Cabbie is asked to comment on an issue of topical importance. This week **Jerzy Brzgski** (minicab no. 73782567) on the problems of increased immigration from Eastern Europe.

Bloody cheek if you ask me guv this EU nonsense opening up our borders to any old Tomasz, Dickhov and Harriovski! Blimey! Coming over here in their thousands, taking all our jobs and spong-ing off the benefit system! My brother Lukasz, right, he's a builder and he's got 15 blokes working for him and they haven't paid a penny in tax since they got off the lorry yeah? and now these bloody Bulgarians, Romanians and what have you are trying to undercut him and put him out of business, he'll have to live off the dole innit?! Those Iraqis had the right idea I mean they should string 'em up it's the only language they understand 'cos they certainly don't understand Polish – bastards! – and as for West Ham I don't know why I support them six bloody nil they need a few Bulgarians if you ask me. I had half a dozen of those Albanians in the boot of my cab last week – very clever men... Victoria Station? Where's that when it's at home?

NEXT WEEK: Mehmet Áttaturk on the need for tighter restrictions on Kurdish immigration.

Private Eye's Top Writers Give Their Predictions For 2007!

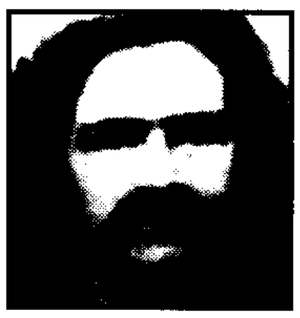
Sally Jockstrap
Sports Editor

Desert Orchid to win back the Ashes for Brazil and Tim Henman to lead Harlequins to victory in the America's Cup. Sportswoman of the Year to go to Frankie Detori.

Mary Ann Bighead
Columnist

I confidently predict that no-one will be cleverer than me in 2007, not even my daughter Intelligencia (7), who will definitely win the Nobel Prize for Cleverness unless she is beaten to it by her sister, Brainella (3).

Dave Spart
Political Analyst



Er... basically I see the collapse of the entire military industrial complex triggering the triumph of the downtrodden proletariat over the fascistic market economy...er... how much am I getting for this 'cos it's extra over Christmas? Er... er...

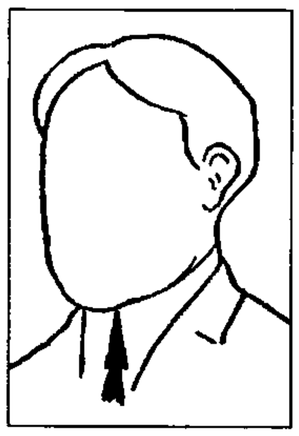
Polly Filler
Lifestyle Editor

Nothing new in the Filler household I fear i.e. yours truly will do all the work like sacking the hopeless au pair from Somalia, Nomahni, for ruining Christmas by asking to be paid the whole time instead of being grateful to be welcomed into a loving family prepared to teach her western traditions like doing the washing up and ironing Simon's new Richard Hammond novelty underpants (complete with skid marks!). Typical male humour viz. childish and not at all funny, unlike my new best-selling Xmas collection of essays "A Partridge in an Au Pair Tree!" (Johnson Pearson Tyrell £16.99).

Beano Boris
Political Commentator

Cripes! Blimey! When have I got to do this by? Yikes! Well, I reckon old Bozza will be getting into some more scrapes this year, probably involving dropping a brick or two or possibly my trousers! Whoops! Cripes! Blimey!

Phil Space
Media Correspondent



I see 2007 as a year in which newspapers will continue to pad out the slack period around the New Year with really dull pieces predicting what will happen in the next year and *(You're fired, Ed.)*

Do Penguins Wear Trousers?

Exclusive extracts from Private Eye's best-selling book of 2006 'Do Wasps Eat Penguins?' (sale to date 24 million)

Q. Is it true that the wheelie-bin was invented by a Belgian?
A.P Rushton

A. Indeed. The first wheelie-bin was designed in Ostend in 1885 by a Walloon fisherman, Andre de Bruges, who used it to transport his daily catch of mussels to a local inn, L'Hotel des Amis de Frites. His prototype was simply a tall wicker basket, which he perched on a set of pram wheels borrowed from his daughter. His fellow fishermen, mostly Flemish, laughingly called it 'Le Walloonie Bin'. However, the then-mayor of Ostend Henri FlammeKucher spotted its potential as a mobile refuse container and marketed it under Le Wheelie-Bin de FlammeKucher. This name failed to catch on, and by 1910 FlammeKucher's son had dropped the family name, thus paving the way to the iconic municipal refuse receptacle in use today.

Sadly, Andre never benefited from his invention and died penniless in 1902. In 1985, to mark the centenary of this world-changing invention, one of Andre's descendents, a New York property developer, Dwight J Brugheimer III, paid for a twice-lifesize statue of his great-great-great-grandfather to be erected in the main hall of the now-refurbished Ostend Moules Marché, where it continues to draw many visitors to this day. In 2002 the statue and its environs were classified by the EU as a European Heritage Site.

Q. Do penguins wear trousers?
B. Tisdall

A. Of course penguins don't literally wear trousers! That would be silly! But the very rare Trouser Penguin (Pinguis pantaloonensis) which inhabits the remote Corby peninsula on South Georgia has distinctive leg markings which make it look from a distance as if it is wearing plus-fours. Indeed to the early British explorer Sir Horatio 'Toppo' Thompson, who discovered the islands in 1854, the bird was known as the 'Plus-Four Penguin'. He wrote in his diary, "We have discovered today a species of penguin hitherto unknown to science. Its flesh was somewhat salty but was reminiscent of the turkey. A curiosity of this species is that at first sight it looks uncannily like a chap dressed for a round of golf. Furthermore, its egg has a mottled shell, very like a golf ball." The Trouser Penguin, which was featured in David Attenborough's recent TV series Planet Penguin, has been placed by the UN on its Red Alert of Most Endangered Avian Species.

Q. Has Heimsteiner's theory of the collapse of the inert nucleid ever been formally proved?
S. Farrimond

A. It is true that when the Austrian physicist Neville Heimsteiner came up with his famous theory in 1924, many of his Cambridge colleagues doubted whether his simplified theorem $D\text{-}X^{13}=C^{10}$ actually explained the phenomenon he called 'parallel connectivity'. But the consensus among modern particle physicists, notably Rufus Firefly, Professor of String at Harvard, is that Heimsteiner's theory holds, so long as the constant C is greater than (that's enough theoretical science, Ed.)

Order your copy now from Eyebooks Direct or choose one from these companion volumes. 'Do Moths Like Custard?', 'Are Bluebottles Really Green?' and 'Can We Have Your Money Please?'

IS POLAR BUSH DOOMED?

by Our Global Warming Staff **N. Dangered** and **X. Tinct**

ENVIRONMENTALISTS today warned that it could soon be the end for the Polar Bush, the fearsome Texan sub-species which used to be king of all it surveyed, but is now restricted to one small patch of thin ice which is rapidly melting under his feet.

Say scientists, "The Polar Bush has a very simple brain which cannot adapt to the fast-changing environment of the world around him.

"The Bush has only one response to all situations, which is to launch a ferocious attack on any threat, real or imaginary, which comes up on its radar."

Some polarologists are already writing off the Polar Bush, saying, "The sooner the world is rid of this terrifying creature, the safer we will all be."

"I was only trying to communicate with them in their own language"

Answers to the 2006 Quiz

1. Russell Brand

2. **a)** 7½ inches
b) Mark Oaten
c) Simon Hughes

3. **i)** Kate Moss
ii) Kate Middleton
iii) Kate Winslet

4. Spamalot is the odd one out. All the others are members of the Shadow Cabinet

5. Russell Brand

6. **a)** John Prescott
b) Tracey Temple
c) 2 minutes 10 seconds

7. President Ahmadinejad does *not* have a beard

8. **i)** Heather Mills
ii) Abu Hamza
iii) Long John Silver

9. **a)** Yo Blair
b) Yo Sushi
c) Yo Yo
d) Johann Sebastian Bach

10. Russell Brand

11. The total is 94. Number of actors who have played James Bond plus number of Dr Who's assistants plus number of members of original line up of Take That

12. Russell Brand

13. **i)** Kazakhstan
ii) Kazuo Ishiguro
iii) Kazoo

14. Jeffrey Archer. All the others are novelists

15. **i)** England lost 5-0
ii) England lost 74-3
iii) England lost by an innings

16. **a)** Lord Levy
b) David Mills
c) 7½ years

17. **i)** Polonium (210)
ii) Polonius (Hamlet)
iii) Polly Toynbee (73)

18. She was the only contestant on the X-Factor to wear the Niqab

19. **a)** Russell Brand
b) Russell Brand
c) Russell Brand

(That's enough quiz, Ed.)

David Cameron Picks The Twelve* Top Britons In History

1 **Nye Bevan**, Tory founder of the National Health Service.

2 **Karl Marx**, author of *Das Kapital* and leading Conservative thinker.

3 **Polly Toynbee**, leading columnist and Tory apologist.

4 **Arthur Scargill**, legendary Tory Union leader, who led the miners strike to victory over the hated Labour Party under Margaret Thatcher.

5 **Not Winston Churchill.** Fascist, imperialist, bow-tie wearing toff who *smoked*. Boo!

6 **Robin Hood.** He stole from the rich, gave to the poor and wore a hoodie. What more could you want?

7 **Tony Blair.** Multiple election-winning Prime Minister and role model, who courageously ditched all his party's policies in order to gain power. The greatest Tory ever.

*I know I promised 12 and only delivered 7 but I can't give you exact figures at this early stage in the electoral cycle. D.C.

IRAQ: ARMY MOVE TO RESTORE LAW AND ORDER

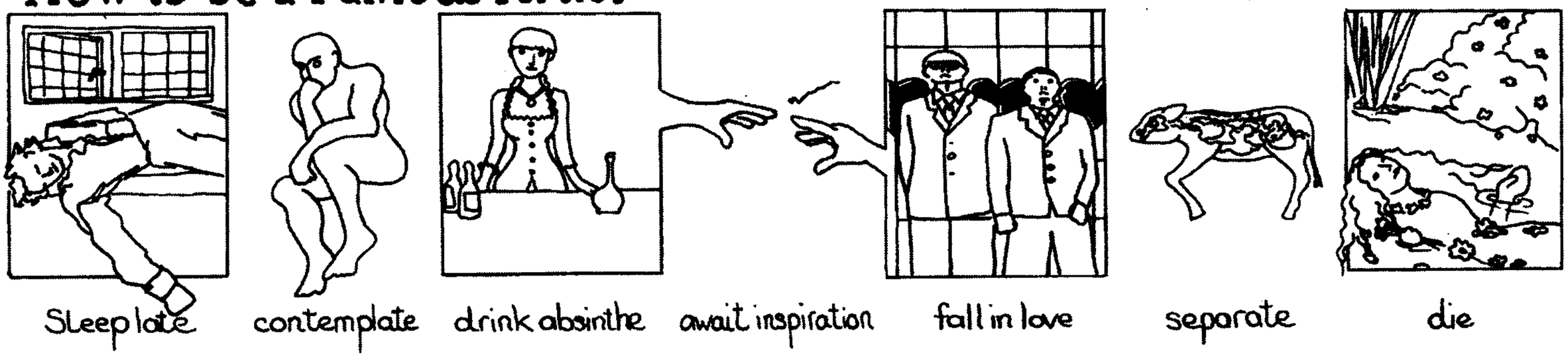
by Our Defence Staff **Bazra Bambigbomb**

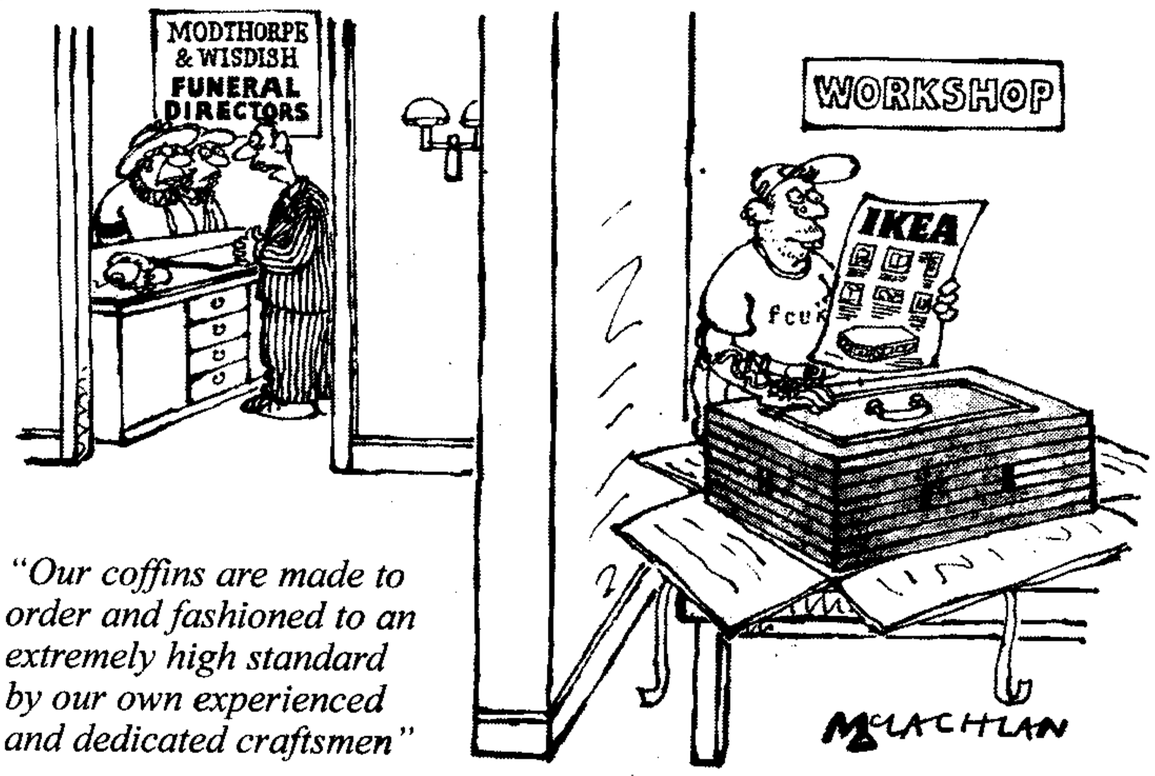
THE BRITISH Army yesterday made a significant move to combat rising lawlessness in the Basra region.

Said the Commander of UK Forces, General Gloom, "It was imperative that we got rid of the dangerous criminal elements operating in this area – which is why we destroyed the prison, let out all the prisoners and got rid of the local police force who we are of course going to hand over to in due course... er... er... hang on... er... *(Continued for 94 years)*

How to be a Famous Artist

Sioux Bradshaw





"Our coffins are made to order and fashioned to an extremely high standard by our own experienced and dedicated craftsmen"

'OUR BOYS WERE SENT INTO BATTLE HOPELESSLY ILL-EQUIPPED'

by Our Political Staff **Christopher Simon-Jenkins**

A CONFIDENTIAL email from one of our lads in the field has brought to light how our recent catastrophic defeat was a "disaster waiting to happen".

The email makes it clear that the England team in Australia was hopelessly unprepared for the battle that lay ahead, and were not provided with even the most basic equipment they needed to survive for more than a few minutes.

The email reveals that the England players had no:

- batsmen
- bowlers
- fielders

THAT EMAIL IN FULL

Dear Mum,

Well here we are in Oz. It is very hot. Captain Flintoff is doing his best in impossible circumstances, but the Aussies are chucking everything at us. They are merciless. Marcus had the right idea, legging it off back to Blighty before the balloon went up *(cont. 94 all out)*

NEW LIB DEM SEX SHAME

by Our Political Staff **Michael White-Christmas**

TOP CHEEKY Girl Ms Gabriela Irimia was today facing a storm of ridicule and derision after her decision to run off with a Liberal Democrat.

Showbiz experts predict that the Romanian singer's career may never recover from the shame of being associated with Lemsip Obit MP, the Liberal Democratic Shadow Spokesman for Asteroids.

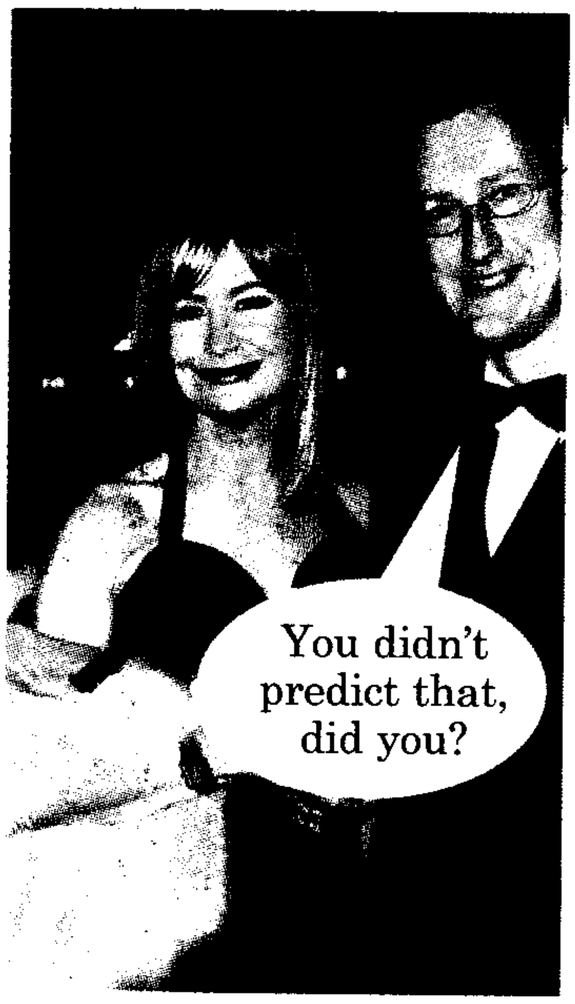
"Gabi will have real problems being taken seriously," said one analyst. "She will be trying to deliver a sensitive song with a message, such as 'Touch My Bum', and people will just be laughing at her because of her links with Britain's third party."

Said another commentator, "It's a big mistake. She's put in all that hard work wearing tight shorts and crop-tops only to throw it all away on a man who supported Mark Oaten for the Lib Dem leadership."

He concluded, "Poor Gabi. I hope she knows what she is doing or she will become a laughing stock in the Romanian Novelty Record singing community."

TV WEATHERGIRL

Depression Coming In From Europe



That Kate Moss/Pete Doherty Marriage Ceremony In Full

Dealer *(for it is he)*: Do you, Pete Crackhead Doherty, take a great deal of drugs?

Doherty: I do.

Dealer: And do you, Kate Snorter Moss, also take a great deal of drugs?

Moss: I can't remember.

Dealer: Would the guests now like to form a line, and then put it up their noses?

Guests: Great.

On Other Pages

- Kate 'n' Pete to Divorce.

How They Are Related

Tommy Docherty
|
Whatsup Docherty
|
Dixon of Docherty Green
|
Pete Bog
|
Pete Moss
|
Pete Crackerty

Moss Bros
|
Stirling Moss
|
Baroness A-Moss
|
Anton Moss Iman
|
Kissmee Kate
|
Cokate Moss

For Potter fans of all ages!!!

Beatrix Potter And The Philosopher's Stone

by Dennis Potter

Starring Renée Zellweger as the much-loved *Daily Mail* columnist Lynda Lee-Potter

INSPIRING story of a little rabbit who discovers that he is a Wizard and has to challenge the mysterious dark force of Mr McGregor.

Trouble starts when Peter eats too many radishes and is taken to hospital suffering from an incurable skin disease.

Watch out for cameo performances from Sue McGregor as the sexy nurse and Alan Bennett as Mr Tiggywinkle.

EYE RATING: Z-Z-Z-Z-Z-Z-Z-Z-Z-Z

That Queen's Xmas Speech In Full

At this time of year when families get together one is struck by how much older people have to offer.

For the elderly still contribute greatly to their community and their country and can continue to do so for a very long time. One is also struck by the promise of the young – the grandchildren who have so much to offer and will in the future contribute equally greatly to their community and their country.

No. It is the middle-aged people who are a bit of a problem, aren't they? One can't help thinking that they're not really up to much.

Still, Happy Christmas to you all.

© Her Majesty The Queen (and not Charles)

House of Windsor

WINTER SALE NOW ON

Very fine gentlemen's overcoats from our Hanover range

THE DUCHY ORIGINAL – knee-length, double-breasted organic camel coat with rear vents and central pleats. Made from pure Poundbury wool, woven by Bulgarian crofters from the Mull of Kintyre.
WAS £2,900 – ***NOW*** £2,899!!

THE WESSEX GREY – full length 100% Ardent Twill with "Really Useless" lining. ***WAS*** £3,700 – ***NOW*** Bankrupt!
All stocks must go!

THE CONSORT – for the older countryman about town. Single-breasted Loden Green Cape-style lined with panda skin and decorated with white rhino horn buttons (slitty eye holes included for easy wear). ***WAS*** £18,000 ***NOW*** £17,700

House of Windsor

Highgrove • Balmoral • Sandringham • Dubai
NEVER KNOWINGLY UNDERDRESSED!

POETRY CORNER

In Memoriam the following persons: President Gerald Ford, Charlie Drake, James Brown, Marmaduke Husssey, Frank Johnson, Lord Lambton, Saddam Hussein, Pauline Fowler and Scobie Breasley.

So. Farewell
Then a lot
Of famous people.

Christmas is
Obviously a very
Dangerous time for
Those in the public eye.

Unfortunately I
Have not
Enough space to
Celebrate all your
Various achievements
And catchphrases.

However I will
Do my best.

Gerald Ford. They said
You couldn't
Walk and chew gum
At the same time.

Now you cannot do
Either.

"Hullo my darlings!"
Said Charlie Drake.

Now it's "Goodbye".

James Brown. They called
You "The Godfather
Of Soul".

Now, you are just
Soul.

Marmaduke Hussey,
Former Chairman
Of the BBC.

Sadly, there is very little
About you on
Wikipedia.

And the same goes for
Frank Johnson.

Lord Lambton,
Famous for three-in-a-
Bed romps.

Now you will
Sleep alone.

Saddam Hussein.
So much has
Been written about
You that any
Further comment
Seems superfluous.

Pauline Fowler,
Launderette manageress.

You hit your
Head on the
Fruit bowl
And dropped
Dead under
The Christmas
Tree.

Except you
Didn't really.

Because you are
Just a character
In a soap.

Though I'm
Not sure
Keith's Mum
Is aware of
This.

As for Scobie Breasley,
Champion race
Jockey.

In a normal week you
Might have
Got a whole
Poem to yourself.

But, sadly, on this
Occasion you
Must remain
Unplaced.

C.B.E.J. Thribb (17½)

The *Eye* is delighted to announce that its resident poet has been honoured in the New Year's List. He is well known for his catch-phrase "That was your catchphrase". He becomes a Knight Commander of the Order of St Christopher (Logue).

the PREMIERSH*TS
PAUL WOOD
WELL HE'S OBVIOUSLY IN A LOT OF DISCOMFORT AND THERE'S QUITE A LOT OF MOANING AND GROANING...
JOHN TERRY BACK TROUBLE
CHELSEA PHYSIO
BUT AS FOR JOHN, HE'S BEEN QUIET AS A MOUSE!
I'VE GOT SO MANY INJURED PLAYERS... WHY ME?.. GROAN... EVERYBODY HATES US...
JOSÉ
TERR

POP SINGER EMBARRASSED BY BLAIRS

by Our Florida Correspondent PHIL POOL

ONE OF the world's most respected popular singers, Sir B.G. Tips, was "horrified" and "appalled" yesterday when the Eye revealed to him the decadent lifestyle of the couple he had inadvertently invited to share his Miami holiday home.

"I thought that Tony and Cherie Blair were just an ordinary prime minister and his wife," he told us. "I had no idea they were into this kind of thing."

Shock

This was the catalogue of shame with which we confronted the stunned Sir B.G.:

● Cherie has long been involved with bizarre new age cults, to which she was invited by her close friend Carole Caplin, with whom she "took showers" and engaged in Aztec "birthing rituals" while husband Tony watched.

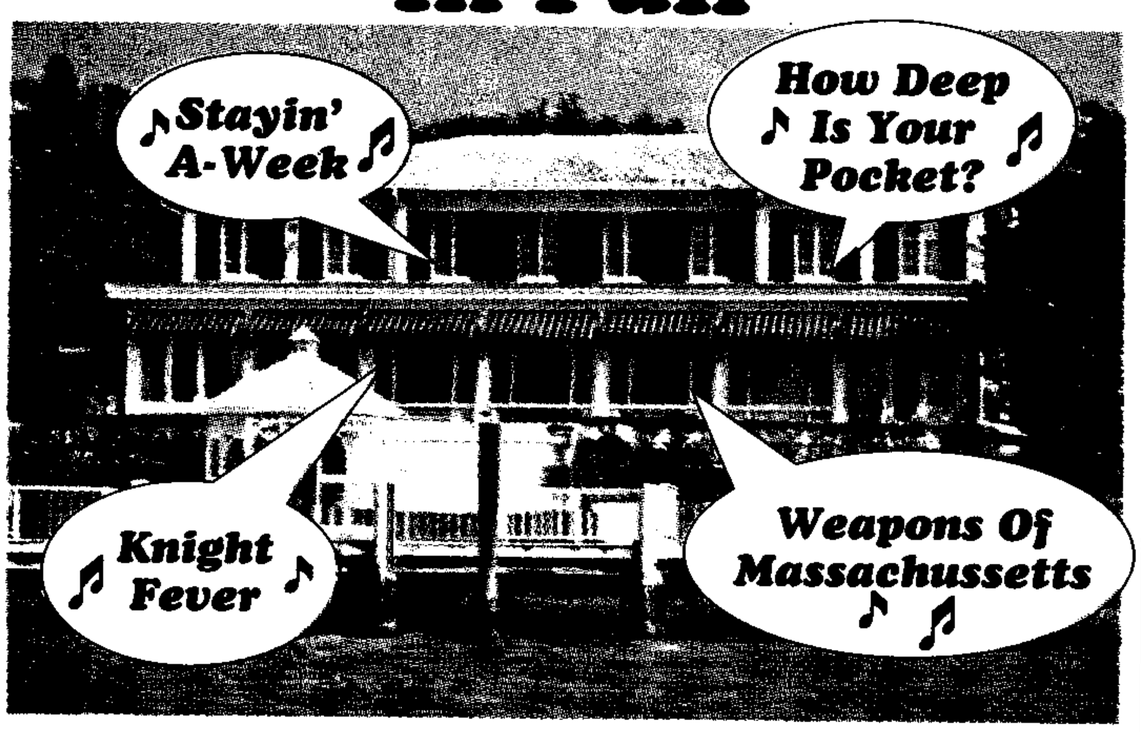
● Tony was "turned on" by money and celebrities, and became seriously addicted to staying in rich people's houses. He had begun with mildly rich people, such as Geoffrey Robinson, but soon graduated to seriously rich figures, such as Sir Clifford Rich, and would regularly fly thousands of miles to satisfy his desperate craving for a free holiday.

● While Cherie acquired notoriety by consorting with known conmen such as Peter Fraudster, Tony was engaged in a massive scam, selling phoney peerages to scores of unsuspecting businessmen in exchange for dubious "loans". He has recently been questioned by police and could well face charges.

As we put the Eye's dossier of decadence to the iconic singer Sir B.G., he hung his head and said, "This is unbelievable. The thought of these people being in my home makes me feel physically sick.

"I can only apologise to the entire British people."

Those Tony Blair FreeBeeGees Holiday Hits in Full



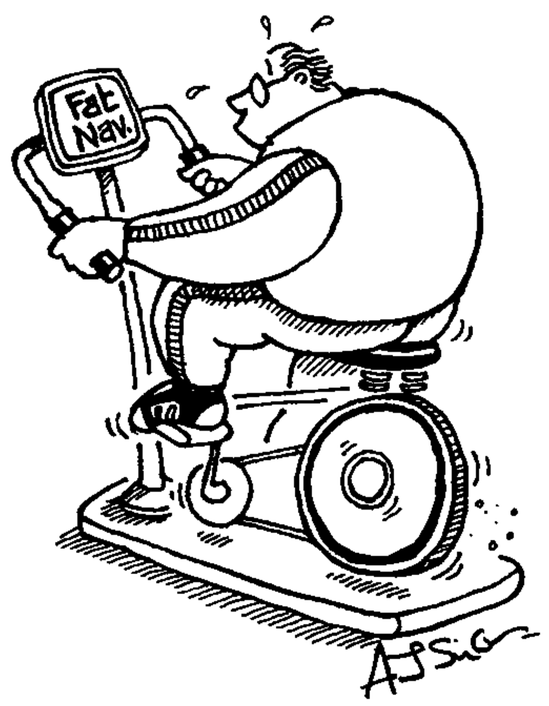
(That's enough songs, Ed.)

New Look for Rumpole

HORACE Rumpole, the much-loved TV barrister, created in the 1970s by the world-famous playwright Sir John Nortiboys, is to be updated, in a new version more suitable for the 21st century.

Out goes the wine-bibbing, chain-smoking, overweight, poetry-quoting, politically incorrect figure who endeared himself to millions with his humorous exploits as he battled for justice in the criminal courts.

In comes the new black, female fitness fanatic, Horatia Rumbabwe, firmly teetotal and a passionate anti-smoker, who quotes the Guardian and lives with her Muslim civil partner in Hackney. The new heroine specialises in racial and gender equality cases before the European Human Rights in Strasbourg.



News In Brief

PRESCOTT SHOCK

DOCTORS HAVE confirmed that gallstones admitted over Christmas suffering from an acute 'John Prescott' will make a full recovery.

"Whilst being painful, unsightly and difficult to dislodge, 'John Prescott' should pose no long term health risk to gallstones," said Dr *(cont. p. 94)*

BLEARS OUTRAGE

LABOUR party chairman Hazel Blears has led the attacks on Hazel Blears for taking part in a protest over the closure of the maternity unit at Hope Hospital in her constituency as part of the Government's NHS reforms.

"I've demanded that as a member of the cabinet Hazel Blears comes to me and explains her actions to Hazel Blears at the earliest possible opportunity" insisted a clearly angry Hazel Blears *(cont. p. 94)*

NEW LABELLING DRAMA

THE Food Standards Agency says tough new labelling guidelines that come into force in 2007 will give parents unprecedented information about the contents of the food their children eat.

"For instance, our decision to put a sticker saying 'may contain sugar' on packs of Britain's favourite breakfast cereal *Sugar-Coated Sugary Frosted Sugary Flakes Of Sugar Puffs* will at last alert parents to the fact the cereal contains sugar," said an FSA *(cont. p. 94)*

DR WHO LATEST

DR WHO has today been criticised for announcing that he won't be seeking another term as the Time Lord, but not giving an exact timetable for his departure.

"This ongoing uncertainty is destabilising the galaxy at a very inopportune time, with a fresh attack from the Cybermen imminent," said one well-placed Dr Who source. "We all know that The Master has been waiting in the wings for several millennia, brooding for the job to be his."

ULSTER STORM

THE decision by Gerry Adams and Sinn Fein to support policing in Northern Ireland has been severely criticised by some hardline republicans.

"This is a real slap in the face for Catholics in the province, when of course they should be being knee-capped behind the pub by us instead," said a republican *(cont. p. 94)*

DIARY

JEREMY CLARKSON

Pardon me? Is my hearing going up the proverbial spout? Did someone really just wish me a Happy New Year? Blimey! Are my ears really in need of a darned good spring clean with one of Mr Dyson's so-called high-powered suction vacuum-style cleaners?

Someone please pinch me with a ten thousand volt cattle-prod and tell me I'm dreaming! 'Cos one thing I know, of all the things there are to know in the world – and, believe me, mate, there are literally millions, when you come to think of it – is this.

So far there's no sign – no bloody sign at all, so far as I can see – that the year of Our Lord 2007 (that's two thousand and seven for those of you who can't handle simple numerals!) can even by the wildest stretch of the imagination – and believe me yours truly's imagination stretches pretty wide, especially for a bloke! – can in any way be described as a Happy New Year.

In fact, these past few days it's been fast turning into something completely different, as Monsieur M. Python and his Crazy Crew would oft find occasion to say. Not a "Happy New Year" at all – but an "UNHAPPY New Year!" And that, my friends, is the exact opposite.

I kid you not, I've had this New Year up to bloody here. First up, I turned on the telly. Now look, I'm as fond of the gogglebox as the next chap. In fact, to my mind, anyone who tries to tell you that Dr Rhodes Boyson's illustrious invention isn't the greatest thing since sliced bread freshly buttered with a goodly dollop of marmalade needs their head examining.

In a just world, those namby-pamby blokes who claim not to like the telly would be forcibly tied to the nearest electric chair and have ten zillion volts zapped through their skulls until they started begging to watch my good friend Mike Parkinson, who must surely be the greatest chat-show host of all time bar none in the history of the world – the guy's a genius.

But this time it was different. So I turn on the telly and what's on? Only the so-called News, delivered in suitably – or unsuitably, more like! – solemn tones by one of those middle-aged blokes who, I have it on good authority, are paid a pretty handsome sum just for reading the news, if you can believe it.

So what was it about this News which got my goat, I hear you ask.

Answer: it was all about little foreigners who can't even speak English doing things in wholly unimportant far-away lands where they stink of garlic, live in igloos, perform native dances in the nuddy, wear towels on their heads and turn their snotty noses up at honest-to-goodness British Pork Pies.

Yes, chums, it was about that most tedious of all places known to man. It was about Abroad.

So there's been a tsunami somewhere abroad. What's that when it's at home, I hear you ask. Well, guys, in common or garden English it means getting a bit of a soaking somewhere very very hot. But you know what? Instead of jumping for joy for a nice bit of cool clear water when the temperatures outside are running into the upper hundreds, Les Natives come bleating to the West – that's you and me, in a nutshell – asking for – you guessed it – our hard-earned cash.

Sorry, mate – no can do. Think about it. Am I going to send a wallet-load of fivers to Johnny Foreigner, just because he's taken a bit of a splashing? Not when there's the new turbo-charged Ferrari MSX with underseat lighting, dual-weather controls and an upper speed range easily nudging 260 miles per hour to be purchased for a cool 100,000 pounds I'm bloody not!

Next up on the so-called New Year News comes footage from Iraq.

Frankly, you only need to know one thing about Iraq, and that's this.

It's full of bloody sand.

I kid you not. There's sand everywhere. Sand in your eyes. Sand in your PG Tips. Sand in the sandwiches.

Tell you what.

There's even sand in the sand!

No wonder half the blokes out there are called Sandy. In fact, I tell a lie. They should be but they're not. They're called Mohammed. Or, failing that, Saddam.

Not an honest-to-goodness George or Geoffrey in sight. 'Fraid not. 'Nuff said.

Anyway, this po-faced newscaster announces that there's some kind of war going on out there in Iraq. And guess what?

Right first time.

We Brits have ridden to the rescue.

Apparently, there was a bloke with a moustache out there called – right first time – Saddam who wasn't at all nice. In fact, he was a bloody nuisance. So we sent in our lads to get rid of him. There's bit of a set-to in the sand – Peeow! Peeow! Akakakakak! Akakakakak! – and once again we Brits win hands down.

So now Saddam's standing there with his hangdog expression and his noose round his neck regretting the day he ever grew that daft moustache, and meanwhile we Brits have restored peace to the desert, with Pork Pies and honest-to-goodness pints of Best British Ale all round, and the little natives all dancing with joy and showering us with their brightly-coloured beads.

Hole in one, as the hard-won golfing fraternity might put it. But do they report this good news on the telly? Well, do they? Do they heck as like!

Finally, we are solemnly informed by Monsieur Le Newscaster that President Ford has just died.

Which prompts just one question: *so who the bloody hell was he when he was at home?*

Turns out that President Ford was once President – hence the name – of America. And now he's dead, ie not alive any more. Boo hoo – not.

Do I look as if I care?

Now, if someone truly important had died – the inventor of the indestructible wing-mirror, f'r instance – then we'd have had good reason to mourn. In fact, I'd have blubbed my eyes out. But some mouldy old fat-arsed ex-President of Yankee-Doodle-Dandy-Land?

Pardon me while I yawn.

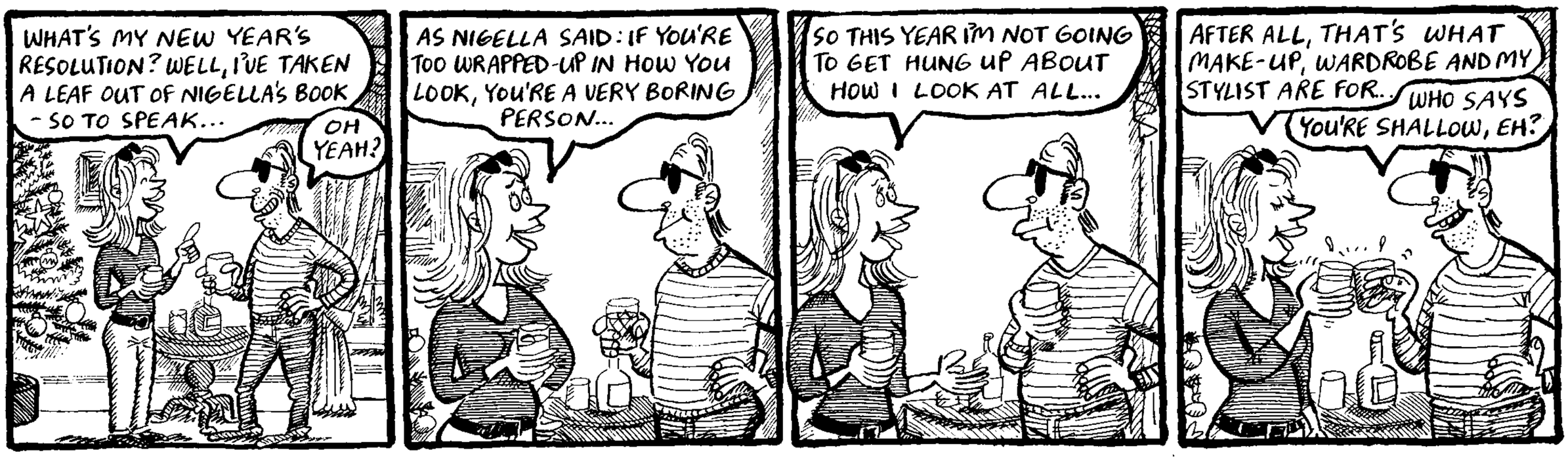
Happy New Year? Not with all these foreigners in the news it's not.

In fact it's a totally Crappy New Year, more like!!!!!

Cheers!

As told to

CRAIG BROWN


WHAT'S MY NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTION? WELL, I'VE TAKEN A LEAF OUT OF NIGELLA'S BOOK - SO TO SPEAK...
OH YEAH?
AS NIGELLA SAID: IF YOU'RE TOO WRAPPED-UP IN HOW YOU LOOK, YOU'RE A VERY BORING PERSON...
SO THIS YEAR I'M NOT GOING TO GET HUNG UP ABOUT HOW I LOOK AT ALL...
AFTER ALL, THAT'S WHAT MAKE-UP, WARDROBE AND MY STYLIST ARE FOR...
WHO SAYS YOU'RE SHALLOW, EH?

Literary Review

Next please!

Next
Michael Crichton
(HarperCollins £17.99)

AMERICAN writers have always been keen on what might be called the "issue novel" – big, buxom slabs of stridency, in which character tends to take second place to whatever socio-political bee is buzzing about in the authorial bonnet. The pick of the bunch appeared just over a century ago: Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* (1906), a ferocious expose of the Chicago meat-packing plants which had the relevant hygiene and labour laws changed within a year.

Somewhere at the fag-end of this fine old tradition can be found the intent, labouring figure of Mr Michael Crichton, one of those dogged readers of the broadsheet op-ed pages who give "research" a bad name. Every couple of years or so our man whales in with one of his big fat doorstoppers, packed out with bibliographies, spoof and not-so-spoof newspaper headlines and dramatic head-shakings over what's wrong with the world. Back in 2004 it was *State of Fear*, in which the environmental lobby was more or less written off as an academic conspiracy. Now it's a 450-page excursus on genetic engineering and a work which apparently "shatters our assumptions and reveals shocking new choices where we least expect".

Naturally Mr C here has done his homework: 35 items on the books consulted list; a dozen web links; a seven-page afterword detailing the "conclusions" reached along the way. Why, there is even a plot, of a sort, involving a biotech company called Biogen and the stark dilemmas facing its weaselly CEO Rick Diehl. These include a lawsuit with a man named Burnet, whose body produces cancer-battling chemicals called cytokines and whose tissues Rick's boffins may have illegally appropriated, and a lurking super-shark investor Jack Watson. It gets worse when Rick, whose other half provided his start-up fund, discovers that wifey is having a Wednesday shake-down with the tennis coach.

There follows a long and slightly implausible pursuit of Burnet's lawyer wife and eight year-old grandson on the grounds that, Burnet having disappeared, Biogen has a right of entry on his descendants' DNA. Meanwhile, a thronged supporting cast has been conjured into life to dramatise all the stuff Crichton mugged up on in the library. It includes a pair of bounty hunters, a bi-lingual orang-utan from the Borneo jungles, a humanoid ape called Dave who appears to have been fathered by some hapless researcher on a female chimpanzee, a brace of organ farmers, a talking parrot and an evangelical geneticist who sees his work as a part of God's almighty plan. The subsidiary topics winched in every chapter or two include selling your eggs, stem-cell research, "chimeras" (people with two lots of DNA) and eco-advertising.

Inevitably, this being the American West Coast, everyone is cheerfully double-crossing everyone else. The real threat to Diehl's prospects turns out to come from nasty Mr Watson who, in one of those deft ironical touches Crichton does so well, is suffering from a rare genetic disorder called "Vogelman's paresis". Needless to say, the book's value as, ahem, *a work of fiction* is negligible. The characters are pieces of cardboard, advertised to the reader via a solitary distinguishing mark (I lost count of the times the head bounty hunter's six feet four inches are solemnly itemised); scene-setting gets done in a couple of sentences; three-quarters of the action is there merely to illustrate whichever axe Mr C happens to be grinding at the moment of entry.

More excruciating even than this, perhaps, are the fugitive moments in which Crichton a) tries a joke, or b) attempts some kind of sophistication. An example of the former comes in the offices of a London advertising agency called – gasp – "Selat, Anney, Koss Ltd". An example of the latter comes when the parrot, fetching up on the coast, watches "the people in white robes come and go, talking of NyQuil and Jell-0", which is a gratuitous little gesture at Eliot's *Prufrock*, with its "In the room the women come and go/Talking of Michaelangelo". Oh yes, *Next* has a moral all right. Nothing to do with the pros and cons of genetic engineering, alas. Just an awful warning about what crawling around in cyberspace can do to your mind.

Dangerous Books for Boys

Books & Bookmen

■ INTERVIEWED by the *Mirror* a month after he nearly died in a 288-mph jet-car crash, *Top Gear* presenter Richard Hammond revealed that he could remember nothing about the incident.

"For two weeks, I simply didn't believe I'd been in a crash... I'm dimly aware of a time when I was in intensive care, of bits of conversations, of a sense of people being around, a sense of urgency. I'd wake up and be very lucid, then pass out and forget it." He also admitted that the injuries to his brain left him unable to reconstruct memories of much of his earlier life: "My own mind was like a foreign place. I didn't know where anything was... Sometimes there was nothing there, complete blankness."

Still, sod it, he's a celebrity, and there was a weary inevitability to the announcement on 17 December that Weidenfeld and Nicolson had shelled out a mere £1m for Hammond's "account of his life before his high-speed crash, the crash itself and his recovery and return to *Top Gear*", to be published in September next year.

■ HODDER'S rush-published *Girl in the Cellar: The Natascha Kampusch Story* by Allan Hall and Michael Leidig has resulted in a hail of claims and counterclaims. Kampusch herself has denounced the book as "selling lies, mean lies, as truth", while Kampusch's father says he didn't grant Hall and Leidig an interview. The authors and their publisher claim that he did. Perhaps most worrying, some Amazon customers seem unable to differentiate between fiction and non-fiction, having bought Hall and Leidig's book and *Hannibal Rising* by Thomas Harris at the same time.

■ "IT HAS been a vintage year for Simon Prosser, publishing director of Hamish Hamilton," a fawning *Guardian* profile claimed last month. "In January Hilary Spurling, who had spent nearly 15 years tending her biography of Henri Matisse, won the Whitbread Prize. Then, in June, Zadie Smith, to whom nine years ago, Prosser paid a six-figure advance for *White Teeth*, won the Orange..."

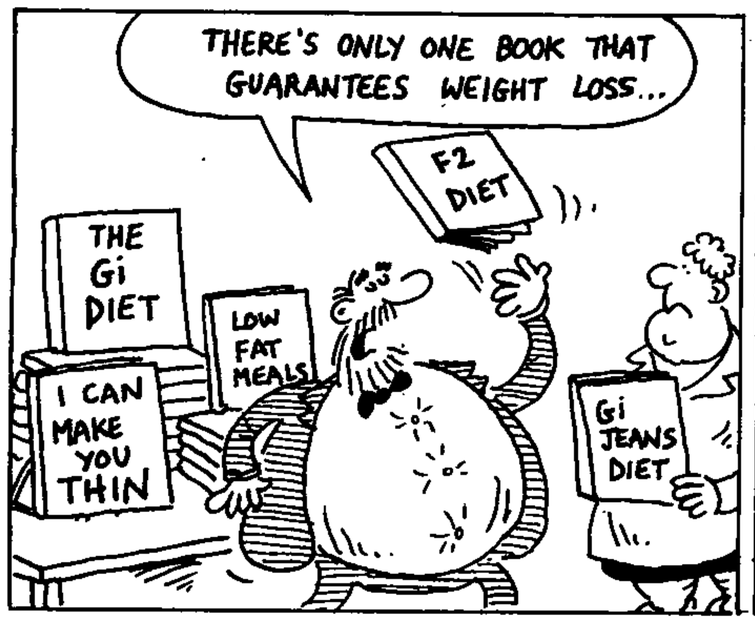
Shome mishtake, surely? The man who signed up Zadie Smith was former Penguin supremo Peter Carson, who paid her £250,000 for a two-book deal covering *White Teeth* and *Autograph Man*. Nor did Prosser recruit Hilary Spurling: he didn't even work at Hamish Hamilton when her Matisse biography was commissioned by Andrew Franklin (who now runs Profile Books). Before joining the company nine years ago, his most notable commissioning feat – as the voice of yoof at Hodder Headline – was paying £125,000 for a quickie biography of the Spice Girls.

■ FEW people – apart from directors and shareholders – have shed tears at the news of Bloomsbury's profit warning. CEO Nigel Newton has tried to suggest that the poor performance is down to "delayed reference rights deals" which date back as far as 1999. Let's hope that this phrase does not become an industry euphemism meaning "repeated over-paying for under-performing books".

■ DESPITE the fact that the prolonged Competition Commission inquiry into the sale of Ottakar's to Waterstone's probably cost him millions, founder James Heneage is bearing up rather well.

He is now quite openly telling people it would more than likely have gone bust within a couple of years, and that there is no future in high street bookselling. Looks like he got out just in time.

'Bookworm'



O·B·N

I am very fond of Tony [Blair]. He's a very pleasant person, he's got a sweet nature and beautiful manners. Very important that – I call manners an outward sign of inward grace and I have never known him do anything mean or nasty.

PAUL JOHNSON, *Daily Mail*

Submitted by J. James

£10 paid for entries put forward for the Order of theBrown Nose.

Pseuds Corner

I dislike decorations of every sort but it would be curmudgeonly to be begrudge these exuberant expressions of folk pleasures. Christmas is a design calamity anyway, so this is not a particularly offensive manifestation of its excesses.

STEPHEN BAYLEY on the increasing popularity of outdoor Christmas decorations, *Evening Standard*

Completists will note with delight that the second disc also includes Ligeti's Cage-inspired Bagatelles (1961): a minute and a half of silence, in three movements, movingly realised in this recording.

ARNOLD WHITTALL,
Gramophone

Williams' lyrics emphasize the philosophic concepts of objective reality, reason, rational egoism and laissez-faire capitalism, while attacking what he sees as the irrationality and immorality of altruism, collectivism and communism. He believes that people must choose their values and actions by reason; that the individual has a right to exist for his or her own sake, neither sacrificing self to others nor others to self; and that no one has the right to take what belongs to others by physical force or fraud, or impose their moral code on others by physical force. Williams' politics have been described as minarchism and libertarianism... [continues]

Entry on Robbie Williams, Wikipedia

The most remarkable book I've read this year was recommended to me by Cees Nooteboom; a fifty-page long essay by the Hungarian scholar Laszlo Foldenyi, Dosztojevszkji Sziberaban Hegelt Olvassa, es sirva fakad (Dostoevsky reads Hegel in Siberia and weeps). I have no Hungarian, so I read it in a Spanish translation.

ALBERTO MANGUEL,
Times Literary Supplement

It must be hard living here with children. I notice the Martin Szekely glass platter – it's cracked. "Jacob threw a Lucio Fontana sculpture at Tatiana and hit the Szekely," says Carine. "Luckily, he didn't throw the Jeff Koons," adds Simon. "He'd have smashed it." Would Simon have had an art attack? He shrugs. There aren't many homes of stark, Zen-like perfection where children can fling sculptures.

CAROLINE PHILLIPS interviews CARINE and SIMON LEE, 'happening people on the international art scene', ***Evening Standard***

CONTRIBUTORS: Paula McWaters, Richard Vyvyan, J. Kinsella, Tom Green, Richard Coles.

£10 paid for all entries

IN THE BACK

CONSULTANCY

NAO problem

AFTER the *Eye* and others had banged on for long enough about the government's reliance on management consultants, the National Audit Office last month finally got round to reporting on the subject.

But, continuing a trend in NAO reports, its few mild criticisms will do nothing to derail the gravy train that was conservatively estimated to cost the taxpayer £2.8bn last year.

On the crucial question of why so much cash is leeching into the consultants' pockets, the NAO largely blamed more large-scale initiatives, overlooking the evidence of its own study that this might have something to do with the consultants' growing control over the policies that generate such bumper pay days.

In a section highlighting "the need to replace consultants with civil servants to regain control and accountability", the NAO pointed out that on a policy as important as the ID cards, "in May 2005 the procurement, marketing, business requirements, resilience and security teams were all led by consultants". As the project offers the prospect of billions for these very consultants, no wonder they were happy to endorse its feasibility soon before Parliament voted. And unsurprisingly there is no mention either of the revolving door on hiring, whereby essential positions such as running the Cabinet Office Delivery Unit and the Identity and Passport Service are in the hands of management consultants, while almost every recently retired mandarin adorns the boardroom of a consultancy firm.

A refusal to address these issues was always on the cards from a review led by a former Accenture consultant now on the NAO's books, Ron Sirdeshpande. The NAO concludes that "it is not possible to make an overall assessment of the benefits that have arisen from the money spent on consultants". What emerges is a picture of government departments not monitoring consultants or how much they spend on them, and not even assessing their work.

NHS I.T.

All aboard BT at Barts

BT HAS adopted a novel approach to its failing £1bn contract to install IT systems in NHS trusts across London: offer jobs to those who give it business.

Brendan Major, information and communications director at Barts and the Royal London NHS Trust, will next month become BT's director of client engagement. Barts is among the more BT-friendly trusts, having signed up to its electronic radiology information and X-ray storage systems. A spokesman refused to say what stage it was at on the main patient record system, though recent trust board minutes show it being talked up (see *Eye* 1168).

BT will be hoping other trusts show similar enthusiasm following Major's intervention, which he described in a valedictory message to Barts staff as "helping bridge the sometimes substantial distance between BT and London's individual trusts". (How BT bosses will react to their new "client engagement" director publicly pointing out the trouble they're in remains to be seen.)

Eye readers may recall another recent BT appointment. In September the firm announced that Barts chief executive Paul White was joining to run all its NHS IT work, starting this month. And it's not so long ago that the company took on as a consultant Andrew Pinder, the former government "e-envoy", when the national programme under which BT is now labouring was dreamt up.

Offering a lucrative position to one senior figure from a trust willing to sign away millions to the company raised a few eyebrows. Doing it with two shows how desperate BT is to make any sort of progress in the capital – and provide the flimsiest of justifications for its claims to the stock market that all's well on one of its biggest contracts.

● Meanwhile some light can be shed on the billions being squandered by Connecting for Health (CfH), the Department of Health agency running the NHS's National Programme for IT that is already years behind schedule.

Buried away in a paper published by the National Audit Office is an estimate that CfH spent £375m on consultants in 2005 alone. As the programme has been up and running for three years now, the total poured into the IT consultants' coffers could well have hit the £1bn mark. Sadly CfH refuses to answer parliamentary and FoI issue, but at least the oft-repeated lie that the programme only costs the taxpayer when it delivers results can finally be nailed.

The idea of a huge nationwide computer project that now sees consultants trousering billions, but which patients and clinicians never asked for, was first sold to Tony Blair by a bunch of consultants invited into Downing Street four years ago. Funny that.

PLAYING FIELDS

Fit for purpose?

PUBLIC health minister Caroline Flint wants us all to be more active after ten "local exercise action pilots" showed that keeping people fit – shockingly – saves the NHS money in the long run. So you might think that more places to be active would be a good thing.

The lucky people of Merthyr Tydfil, South Wales, are to trade their run-down sports centre for what's being described as a "complete leisure experience". Work is about to start on a building with three new pools, including one with waterslides, squash courts, a fitness suite and a sauna on the site of the old Rhydycar Leisure Centre. All good stuff, but at what cost?

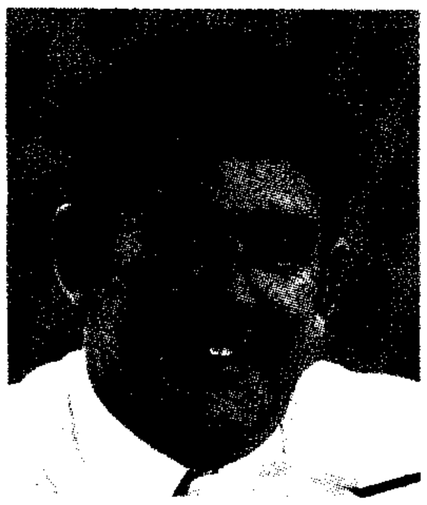
As part of the £30m pound deal between Merthyr Tydfil council and Atlantic Property Development, a ten-pin bowling complex, a cinema, a 60-bed budget hotel and a pub will be built on the land around the new leisure centre. There will also be parking for 800 cars as the site is out of town.

But what currently surrounds the old leisure centre? Playing fields and green open space, where people could get fit for free.

The council hasn't yet published the price list for activities at its "amazing new complex", but the experience at regenerated leisure centres elsewhere has been that prices for the better facilities have hiked.

As well as losing the land at Rhydycar, two other popular if run-down swimming baths are to be closed to balance the leisure budget – Gwaunfarren and Edwardsville, which is six miles away from Merthyr. Regular users say they're less likely to swim if they have to take a long bus ride there and back. So much for the council's claims that the new centre will encourage people to be "more active, more often".

● In Devon, PFI contractors Carillion are laying out the grounds of the new West Exe Technology College – including a rugby pitch that PE teachers say will be too small even for children's matches. The school used to have enough grounds for three full-sized pitches and an athletics track, now they will have one pitch, 67 metres long (the standard school pitch is 110 metres), while much of the site will become a larger car park. Carillion has already been forced to re-open a Lottery-funded community sports pitch on a site next to the school after a campaign by Exeter local paper the *Express & Echo*. It had closed down the site to avoid staffing it at evenings and weekends.



TOBACCO

Dirty habits all round?

TOBACCO baron Nigel Northridge, chief executive of Gallaher (pictured), stands to pocket a cool £13m if Japan Tobacco's £7.5bn takeover bid for his company goes through this year.

But before ordinary shareholders accept his recommendation to support the bid, there is the tricky matter of a £300m High Court action alleging Gallaher's complicity in worldwide tobacco smuggling and sanction-busting in Saddam's Iraq.

The lawsuit is being brought by Gallaher's distributor, Abu Hameed Tlais. But over Christmas his brother, Fahed Ahmed Tlais – Gallaher's distributor in Lebanon – upped the ante by serving a separate claim in Beirut accusing current and former executives of fraud and selling "spoiled goods… invalid for human consumption". A flurry of further writs is expected over the next few weeks.

Gallaher, which makes Benson & Hedges and Silk Cut, says it will vigorously defend all actions by the Lebanese brothers. But chances are that Japan Tobacco will want to force a settlement of the claims as part of its takeover.

The messy proceedings began two years ago when Northridge was hauled in front of the Treasury Select Committee to explain why nearly three-quarters of the smuggled cigarettes originating from the UK seized by British Customs in 2003-2004 were Gallaher brands. Northridge blamed Tlais Enterprises and said he had terminated their contract.

Customs had already red-carded the distributor, which meant it couldn't trade. But Tlais countersued Gallaher alleging the company had orchestrated a worldwide smuggling operation to compete against its British rival, Imperial Tobacco.

Embarrassing claims have already emerged in court papers that Gallaher once enlisted the help of the Islamic militant group Hezbollah to recover duty paid in Iran. More disclosures may follow, and no one in the industry is keen for a court case to shine a legal spotlight on how Big Tobacco practices its trade around the globe – particularly in the growing Russian market; Gallaher's lucrative Russian contracts are apparently what attracted Japan Tobacco in the first place.

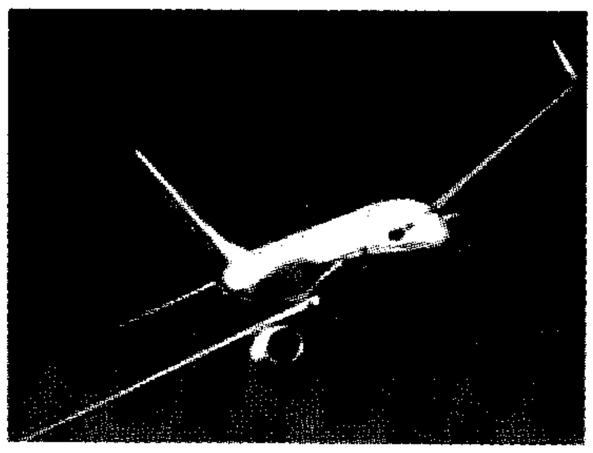
The last round of industry consolidation was in 1999, when Japan Tobacco bought RJ Reynolds' international operations – another company embroiled in cigarette smuggling allegations, on that occasion from the US into Canada. The two firms are still arguing over who is liable for $1bn in lost revenues claimed by the Canadian authorities. A similar situation here may have to be resolved before the red sun sets on Gallaher.

BOEING

Missed alarm bells

RECENT newspaper reports on an investigation into the Helios plane crash near Athens in 2005 focused on human error as the main cause of the disaster that killed all 121 on board.

The two pilots of the Cypriot 737-300 had not noticed that the cabin's compression switch, which regulated oxygen supply, was set to manual rather than automatic. And they then misunderstood the automatic alarm warning of a dangerous drop in cabin pressure.



The disastrous result was that the crew became incapacitated by a lack of oxygen. The plane flew on autopilot for two more hours until it ran out of fuel and crashed, concluded Akrivos Tsolakis, head of Greece's National Aviation Safety Board. Maintenance crews were also criticised for leaving pressure controls on the wrong setting.

Little media attention has focussed on Boeing, the aircraft's manufacturer, and its apparent failure to minimise the risks of such human error. Yet the investigator's report was highly critical of Boeing's "inadequate" response to several similar incidents involving cabin pressure problems in the aircraft worldwide. "A number of remedial actions had been taken by the manufacturer since 2000, but the measures had been inadequate and ineffective in preventing further similar accidents and incidents," the report concluded.

Veteran pilots of the 737-300 have told the *Eye* that one of the key problems is that the cabin high altitude warning alarm for pilots is identical to the alarm that sounds when instruments are not set properly for take-off, i.e. the configuration warning. The Boeing argument for using the same horn system is that if the aircraft is in the air, it cannot be a configuration warning.

However, one pilot told the *Eye* that he knew of at least one incident involving a low cost airline where a pilot had been looking for a configuration fault when in the air and only realised it was an altitude problem when a flight attendant asked why the oxygen masks had dropped. He said confusion was understandable because when pilots do their simulator checks and training, they constantly hear the alarm as a configuration warning.

The Helios report recorded three other such incidents when there had been an initial confusion on the part of a pilot. And it seems the crash pilot made exactly this mistake. The report says that as the doomed plane climbed through 16,000ft, the captain contacted Helios's operations centre to report a "take-off configuration warning" and an equipment cooling problem.

The pilots also complained that the high altitude warning does not activate the master warning system and simply deafens and distracts. They said that other lights – including the green "manual" control lights – are not "highly visible"; and that the craft has two types of pressurisation selector panel, which both adds to the complexity of sorting out a pressurisation problem and could lead to not spotting the mis-set switches in the first place, as happened in the Helios case.

The *Eye* submitted a list of these and other pilot concerns, including that the master warning system can be cancelled, that there is a similar "gear" horn warning, and that the alert bell from the cabin to the cockpit is often inaudible. But the airline simply referred us back to sections of the Aircraft accident report "that address Boeing's actions prior to and after the accident".

The report covers only part of the pilots' concerns and makes clear that there are no plans to change the warning system – merely a proposal for better training and revised manuals to help pilots "understand and recognise the differences between the two meanings of the warnings horn". So that's all right then.

IMMIGRATION

Fair, firm and effective?

SO MUCH for the government's "fair, firm and effective" immigration policy. First it goes poaching foreign professionals from abroad, then it changes its mind and boots them out.

Gary Douglas, a 45-year-old computer engineer with 20 years' experience, sold his business, home and car in New Zealand to settle in England under the government's Highly Skilled Migrant Progamme (HSMP). In return for the right to live, work and remain here he signed a declaration saying he would make Britain his main home – and indeed that is what he did. His 15-year-old son is currently studying for his GCSEs.

But suddenly, and with little meaningful consultation, ministers changed the rules governing highly skilled workers and applied them retrospectively. So Mr Douglas and people like him no longer qualify for residency. "I am about to lose all that I have worked for in the past and all that I have struggled to achieve since I have been here," he said.

Under the old scheme, people who entered under the HSMP qualified for automatic extensions to their entry visas, eventually securing an indefinite right to remain. But now they have to meet a points criteria – weighted towards qualifications, youth, income and time in fixed employment. Those who run their own businesses but do not have six months worth of orders on their books, or those who have not been in continued employment for six months in jobs that were advertised can, like Mr Douglas, be caught out. Although clearly fluent in English, he doesn't even apparently meet the new mandatory English language requirement. It is estimated that some 47,000 people may be in a similar position.

Earlier this month, lawyers acting for immigrants and for businesses that rely on foreign skilled workers warned immigration minister Liam Byrne about a possible brain drain. They also warned that the new points system, if applied retrospectively, is unfair and may be unlawful. "Many of these highly skilled people could have and would have chosen to move to other countries had they known that the scheme was not in fact offering any certainty at all and could be changed at any moment without notice or consultation, thereby severely disrupting many of their businesses and livelihoods and UK businesses which have contracted relationships with contractors, consultants and employees who have HSMP status," warned Chris Randall, a specialist immigration lawyer.

He contested claims by Mr Byrne that so-called "transitional arrangements" allowing for work permits would avoid disadvantaging those who fail to meet the new requirements, arguing that many would be caught out. Mr Douglas and his MP, Martin Horwood, have each now written to Liam Byrne complaining that the new criteria are completely different to the ones under which Mr Douglas contracted to come to the UK. They have had no response. Mr Douglas and other HSMP migrants have now instructed lawyers to prepare judicial review proceedings against the "unfair and unjust" new regulations, to be filed early in the new year. They expect to win.

Paul Day latest

DURHAM POLICE are investigating the death of a police and prison informant who was found hanging in jail (see last *Eye*).

Detectives confirmed that they are now looking into the treatment of Paul Day, 31, who was found dead in his cell in the segregation unit of Frankland Prison, Durham, on 2 October 2002.

An inquest jury concluded that Day was driven to kill himself because staff did nothing to stop fellow inmates abusing him, and because of other systemic failures in care. Vital evidence about his treatment in prison was not disclosed to the jury or in Prison Service investigations into his death. Detectives will meet Day's parents in January, following an official complaint from them.

HEALTH

Trust threatens campaigning MP

A HOSPITAL trust holding secret files on children experimented on and treated by paediatrician Professor David Southall has threatened to seek legal costs from MP John Hemming, who is campaigning for disclosure.

During stalled General Medical Council hearings against Prof Southall, it emerged that he had kept thousands of "special case files". Some relate to cases which ended in Criminal or Family Court care proceedings, raising question marks over those decisions. Others relate to experiments by the professor and others on Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS), which involved reducing levels of oxygen in the air and in some cases administering carbon monoxide to babies with breathing difficulties.

Eye readers will remember that Southall was found guilty of serious professional misconduct by the GMC after he wrongly accused the husband of solicitor Sally Clark of murdering their two children. Mrs Clark was cleared of murder by the Court of Appeal in 2003.

Southall was banned from child protection work for three years. Other parents then lodged complaints resulting in further GMC charges, including tampering with medical records, keeping secret files and abusing his position. One mother accused him of treating her child like a "laboratory rat". He has been cleared on one charge, but other matters were adjourned until November.

During the GMC hearing, Southall was asked what access lawyers acting for those contemplating legal action had to his "special case files". He replied: "My understanding is that it is very complicated, this, and it depends what was being asked for. If they were asking for the recordings, then I provided them. If they were asking for the special case file, having found out that we had it, then they were provided with it, or those bits of it that I could provide."

Which means, of course, that if no one knew about the files then they stayed secret.

So John Hemming has been calling on the University Hospital of North Staffordshire NHS Trust – where Southall is a consultant paediatrician – to hand over all the secret files. Although they also relate to his work at other hospitals, the professor has apparently taken them with him to North Stafford.

In December, Mr Hemming told the hospital that it might be subject to court action, including a judicial review, if it continued to sit on the files and not alert patients to their existence. In response, he received a letter from the trust's Birmingham lawyers Mills and Reeve threatening to take him to court to recover any legal costs it incurred in responding to the threat of legal proceedings.

"If this is an attempt to shut me up by charging me thousands of pounds for the temerity of writing a letter, then it won't work," Mr Hemming told the *Eye*.

Indeed not. Just before Christmas he raised the issues of both the secret files and concerns that Southall's experiments on babies may have resulted in brain damage or death in the Commons, where statements are protected from legal proceedings by privilege. He said the so-called "sleep studies" started with about 7,000 babies born in the mid-1980s at Doncaster and Rotherham hospitals. He said that phase three of the studies "involved choking babies for 10 sessions of 10 seconds, depriving them of oxygen by giving them only 15 percent oxygen rather than the normal 21 percent, and then giving them too much carbon dioxide".

Mr Hemming went on: "A large number of brain-damaged babies were born in Doncaster in the 1980s. However, the records showing which babies were in the experiments were not in the medical files, because Dr Southall kept secret files, known as 'special case files'. Although compensation was paid, the causation was not entirely clear."

He said that the Office for National Statistics provided details of all deaths from SIDS – about 12,000 cases – so that Southall could continue his research with the siblings. It wasn't clear how many of those children were subjected to sleep studies or what the outcome was, but he said that two families were now alleging that their children "probably suffered brain damage as a result". It has been reported that South Wales police are investigating one of those allegations.

Mr Hemming told the *Eye* that about 30 families are pursuing complaints: "Many patients are completely unaware that the files exist. I have made numerous requests of the NHS to control the files and legal proceedings are continuing in an attempt to keep them intact. However, the authorities continue to resist this, and to tolerate a major cover-up."

Asked why it has threatened to pursue costs against an MP raising an issue of public interest, the hospital trust said in a statement: "Mr Hemming has made a number of allegations that officers of the Trust have behaved unlawfully and has made repeated statements of his intention to issue Judicial Review proceedings against the Trust. However the Trust, acting on the advice of its solicitors, has explained to Mr Hemming that it cannot lawfully take the steps that the MP has requested in relation to the confidential information in Special Case Files." The Trust was merely reserving "the right to recover the costs of responding to any legal action so the money can be spent on patient care", it said.

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION

The final frontier

JUST weeks after the government's friends at consultants Frontier Economics produced their report on the Freedom of Information Act (see *Eye* 1170), the Department for Constitutional Affairs has put out what it laughably calls a "consultation" on changing the rules.

Contrary to Cabinet Office guidelines on such moves, there is no real consultation at all. The big decisions have been made. As Frontier suggested, the £600 limit on the cost of considering requests made under the Act will include the value of time spent checking whether any of twenty-four exemptions apply and weighing up questions of public interest. And the cost limit will now apply not to each individual request but to all those submitted by one person (or organisation) in a three-month period.

Just a year after Lord Chancellor Charlie Falconer claimed that "the culture of secrecy in Whitehall, and beyond, is cracking open", these measures all but nullify freedom of information for journalists and campaigners and for informing debate on matters of major public interest. The legal advice on going to war in Iraq, eventually forced out of Downing Street by the Information Commissioner, for example, would never have seen the light of day under the proposed rules. Nor would much of the information the *Eye* has extracted on subjects that the government would rather not see scrutinised, such as the private finance initiative.

The "consultation" includes a draft of the regulations that will change the law, and it shows just how determined the government is to stop people finding out too much. In calculating the costs of a single requester's questions in any three-month period, public bodies will be able to take into account those from "different persons who appear … to be acting in concert or in pursuance of a campaign". Perish the thought that anyone in Britain should campaign on an issue, though the more mischievous reader might wonder how officials will know who is acting in concert with whom!

The one silver lining is that the changes can only come into effect for requests made after a certain date, which will be at least a couple of months from now as the "consultation" ends on 8 March. Any made before then will be covered by existing rules. Time to get the thinking caps on: what information would you like to get out before the shutters come down?

● The government hopes to save **£100 million** over the next three years by restricting freedom of information. It's worth remembering that this is the government which has spent **£7.2 billion** on management consultants in the last three years.

TAX

Artful Dodger at HMRC?

WHEN reports reached *Private Eye* that a senior member of the board of HM Revenue and Customs had been caught out by tax inspectors in a sweep of undeclared offshore bank accounts, the *Eye* was sceptical.

Surely there would have been an instant high-profile resignation from the public payroll (there hasn't been)?

As HMRC can't discuss individuals' affairs, the *Eye* asked under Freedom of Information laws how many current or former directors had been investigated in the previous year for submitting incorrect tax returns, and of those, how many related to offshore dodges. A swift answer of "zero" was fully expected to put an end to the matter. Strangely, however, weeks passed and no reply came despite several reminders. Only a call from the Information Commissioner forced a reply of sorts, long after the statutory deadline.

Not only wouldn't HMRC say how many of its top brass's returns had been probed, it even refused to admit that it knew the number, citing various statutory excuses. In breach of FoI law, however, it wouldn't explain why these applied.

An "internal review" of the non-response by the "Head of Information Governance" within the "Knowledge Resources" section hasn't shed much more light. HMRC does now admit that it knows the number but still won't disclose it,

claiming that as "a relatively small number of easily identifiable individuals" fall within the scope of the question, to do so might enable identification, breaching data protection laws. The number of people is in fact well into double figures so this reason – normally used in cases covering a handful of people – is hard to fathom. But such is HMRC's anxiety on the issue that it claims speculation would "make relationships with external stakeholders more difficult" and thus "prejudice the effective conduct of public affairs".

Really?

In the City

"THIS slush fund allegation was not going to be a prosecution… A case that is going to go nowhere… My judgment was it would not succeed… It would not have got anywhere at the end of the day."

These were just some of the dismissive comments with which the attorney general, Lord Goldsmith, justified to BBC Radio Four *World at One* listeners on 15 December his decision, announced the previous evening, to persuade/browbeat a reluctant Serious Farce Office into dropping the BAE Systems Saudi corruption case.

Throughout his interview, Goldsmith was eager to focus on the "very big problems" a prosecution would present – without dwelling on the pressure from the Saudis and BAE relayed through his master, the Prime Minister, whose "public interest considerations" he admitted to having "passed on" to the SFO.

But as ever with politicians – and even senior law officers pledged to uphold something a little higher than political expediency, such as the rule of law or even morality – Goldsmith was less than candid, if not misleading, and not just about whose decision it was to drop the case.

Had the more than two-year, multi-million-pound SFO investigation found any evidence of corruption?

"The view of the SFO in relation to these payments is that no prosecution should be brought before the coming into force of the new Act," Goldsmith told the Lords the previous day, referring to the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001 which made bribing overseas officials an offence. Notice the implicit confirmation that there had indeed been corrupt payments made by BAE to Saudi officials.

Goldsmith appeared to make a similar admission of corrupt payments on the BBC, when he said that after 2001 the SFO had "very little hard evidence apart from some isolated payments". In other words, there were corrupt payments as defined under the new law – despite BAE denying any wrongdoing – but we are not going to do anything about them because it would upset the beneficiaries.

So was there nothing we could do? Well, not quite. But that was not the impression presented by the attorney general.

Goldsmith chose to use the problems created by his and Tony Blair's slowness in making corruption of overseas officials a specific crime as his justification for caving in to blackmail from the Saudis. As with Labour's similar lack of enthusiasm for a corporate manslaughter law (because of lobbying from business interests, and despite manifesto promises and public rhetoric), Blair and Goldsmith dragged their feet over anti-bribery long enough that only payments made from 2002 can be prosecuted.

But that, like the lack of Saudi help also stressed by Goldsmith as a reason for doing nothing, was a given from the 2003 get-go for the SFO investigation. The issue was always whether there were provable payments or favours after 2001 – if there was to be a prosecution under the new law. Yet Goldsmith had seen no reason to veto the probe in 2004, 2005 or even in 2006, until BAE landed the £10bn Eurofighter contract in September.

From the start of the SFO investigation it was clear – and to none more than BAE – that the investigation was also looking at possible offences which were not time-restricted like corruption. These included false accounting regarding the payments made to marketing and travel companies from an alleged £60m "slush fund".

This looked after Saudis linked to the all-important £40bn Al-Yamamah contract. Such as Prince Turki bin Nasser, deputy head of the Saudi air force and more importantly son-in-law to the Saudi defence minister Prince ("corrupt interest in all contracts" – former British ambassador) Sultan. Sultan's son, Prince Bandar, now the Saudi foreign minister, is said to have led the charge to bully Blair into stopping the SFO probe, especially once it began knocking on the doors of Swiss banks used by the Saudis and their frontmen.

Yet Goldsmith never mentioned false accounting. Instead, "all the slush fund stuff" was addressed as if it could only be prosecuted under the new anti-bribery law. "That is all pre-2002 when the SFO had decided they should not prosecute because it is not covered by the change in the law that we did not make until 2001," he told the BBC. False accounting has been a criminal offence since at least the 1968 Theft Act. It is an SFO staple charge.

The boxes of documents presented to the SFO by two travel agents used by BAE cut-outs to look after the Saudis contained ample potential evidence of false accounting. One 1995 monthly invoice for a mere £987,365 was reduced to "accommodation serviced and support for overseas visitors". But then these were invoices for the business that dare not speak its real name. Such invoices were repeatedly nodded through by the BAE finance team at the highest levels, including the boardroom. False accounting from the 1990s was and still is prosecutable.

So too is money laundering, which is increasingly seen as the flip-side of any false accounting prosecution where illegal or dubious payments are being covered up. The SFO discovered evidence of offshore companies being used to move millions of pounds in suspected commissions off the BAE books. Such devices are usually the basis for money laundering charges.

Goldsmith made no mention of a prosecution for either false accounting or money laundering. But that would have given the game away.

So, too, would his refusal to explain why suddenly – after al-Yamamah's successor, the Eurofighter contract, was announced and subsequent intensive lobbying/threats from BAE and other suppliers plus the Saudis – this was "a case that is not going to succeed", despite the fact that the SFO had been on the road more than two years, made several arrests if no charges and interviewed as high up the BAE food chain as former chief executive Sir Dick Evans. Goldsmith would only say he had been considering the case for "some time".

Concerns such as the legal problem about payments before 2002 were present from the beginning, yet Goldsmith had not felt the need to intervene despite increasing cries of pain from BAE. His judgment that the case "would not succeed" for "different or additional reasons" to those of the SFO only became overwhelming after the Eurofighter contract. At that time and afterwards, the SFO was still hot to trot despite accepting the difficulties. A prosecution may not have had any Saudi defendants but it would have made clear who was getting what and why from BAE.

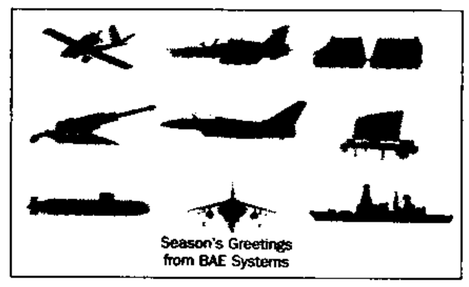
"This is a decision by the prosecutor. It is not a political decision," Goldsmith told the Lords. "I did not press them [the SFO] to reach that decision… it was important they should know what the public interest considerations were," he assured the BBC. One wonders what Goldsmith's response would have been had he been pressed Paxman-style as to whether he had threatened to overrule or fire SFO director Robert Wardle if he did not agree.

The SFO answers to the attorney general, who has the power both to force it to investigate or indeed to drop a case. Back in 2002, Goldsmith over-ruled then director Rosemary Wright, who had turned down an anti-cartel investigation into the supply of generic drugs on the grounds it was too complicated and too costly. Goldsmith's decision to force an investigation followed pressure from the Treasury and the Department of Health. That case has so far cost close to £20m and has yet to go to trial.

While the SFO only considered the BAE case "uncertain" (Goldsmith's words), he considered it

SPREADING a little peace on earth over the holiday season was BAe's tasteful Christmas card featuring cut-out gold, blue and silver stars on the front.

The card opened up to reveal traditional symbols of peace such as the Type 45 destroyer, the Astute class submarine, the M777 field gun and the BvS10 armoured personnel carrier. At the centre of the display of seasonal goodies was the Eurofighter Typhoon, £10bn-worth of which will soon be on their way to Saudi Arabia, thanks to the government's intervention before Christmas to halt the Serious Fraud Office investigation!



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"would not have got anywhere". This was an opinion reached before the secrets of the Swiss accounts were revealed and without the further 18 months of investigation envisaged by the SFO.

No wonder Wardle's public statement was so terse. As the SFO director told the *Financial Times* (16 December), "it was not possible to reach such a firm view until an investigation was over". But then he, unlike Goldsmith, is an experienced criminal prosecution lawyer not a politico-legal hack.

Goldsmith argued that unlike in "the classic corruption case", where a company managing director would be called to prove that he had not authorised bribes to a sales director, "the SFO were never going to produce anybody from Saudi who would say that". The SFO and Goldsmith knew from day one that it could expect no co-operation from Saudi Arabia as far as evidence, witnesses or extradition were concerned. Furthermore, the issue – as Goldsmith knew – was not bribes to BAE executives but kickbacks to representatives of the client, Saudi Arabia.

But more remarkably, Goldsmith then went on to say in effect that all the payments by BAE – including the ones he admitted were possibly corrupt – had been "authorised at the highest level and was entirely what the Saudis wanted". So BAE was doing what its client wanted and that was all right, even if it might be corrupt? Was that why the company denied it had broken any law? If so, why did the invoices not reflect exactly what "support" meant? Were BAE's auditors, KPMG, fully advised of the nature of these payments? After all, those who receive kickbacks – as the Saudis did from BAE – if they are the client naturally authorise this misuse of the company or country's money.

There are no public answers to these questions any more than there is evidence of the "massive damage" represented by the Saudi threat not to assist in the war on Al-Qaeda-linked terror – a war in which the Saudi royals are almost as much of a target because of their greed and corruption as their "Crusader" allies. So the "public interest" was all about the Eurofighter contract and the related UK jobs. But as that is a consideration – like upsetting foreign allies – barred by the OECD anti-bribery convention to which Britain was a belated signatory, it cannot be admitted.

Which is why Labour donor and Blair peer Lord Goldsmith, that supposed champion of the rule of law who assures us that corruption "matters hugely", can be so economical with the truth.

ONCE again it is time for the Gnome Institute for Greed Management to honour those who excelled in 2006.

Crook of the Year: Farepak chief executive William Rollason, for inflicting more harm on more people at the worst time by using 140,000 customers' Christmas deposits as cash flow for failing parent European Home Retail, and encouraging them to continue paying when their money was lost.

Newcomer of the Year: Jacob "Kobi" Alexander, former chief executive of software group Comverse Technology, now fighting extradition from Namibia after pocketing $57m in illegally backdated share options – the latest dirty little secret to emerge from the US executive suite, proving greed lives post-Enron.

Comeback of the Year: former porn promoter Ruth Parasol, who with her husband persuaded investors to buy their PartyGaming shares, worth personally over £400m, in an online business that was illegal in its main market before the share price collapsed off the back of prosecutions of rival operators.

Suit of the Year: Sea Containers founder Jim "not to blame" Sherwood, for treating himself generously as the company, owner of train operator GNER and once of classier assets such as Orient Express Hotels, collapsed into debt-driven bankruptcy leaving two UK pension funds in deficit.

'Slicker'

EYE CROSSWORD 330

by Cyclops

£100 prize to first correct solution opened on 12 January 2007

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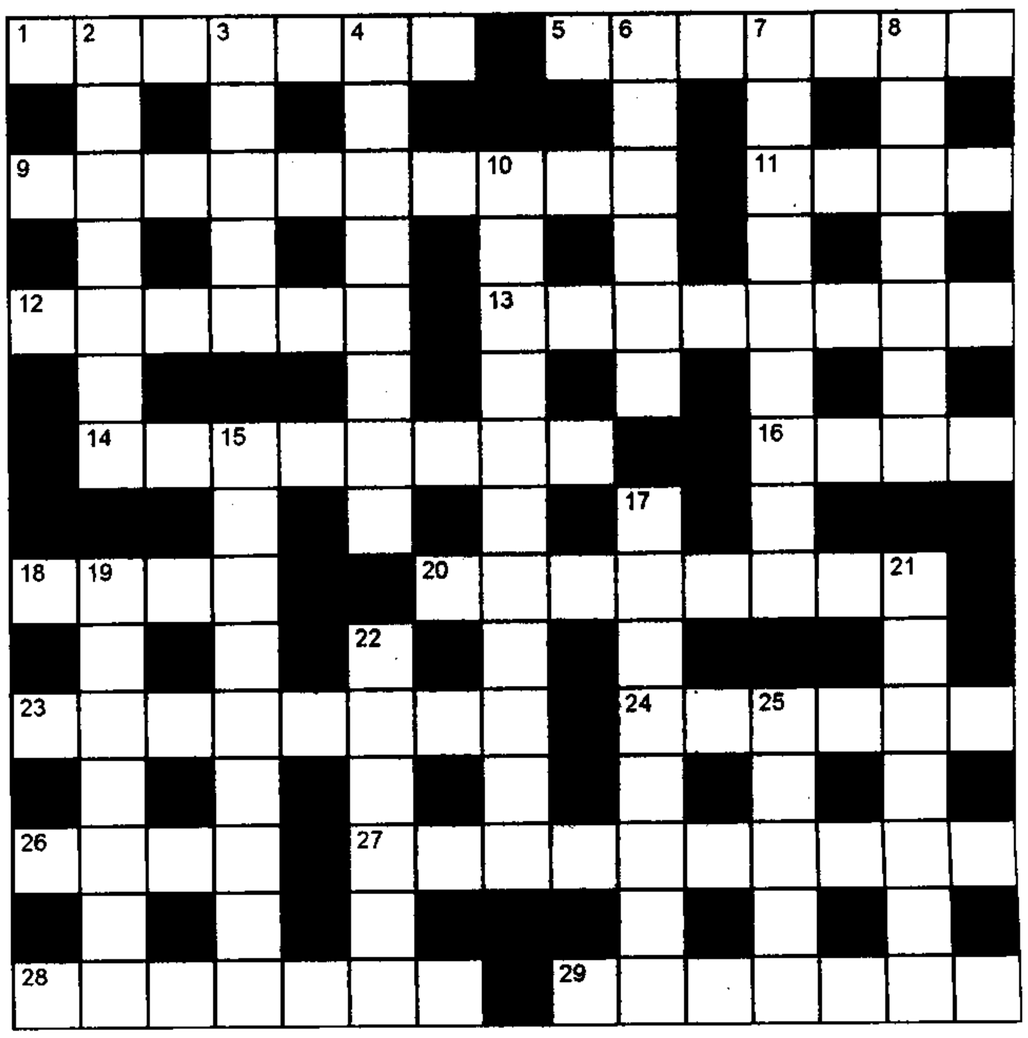


ACROSS

1 Vain candidate's girl with sailor seen in *Private Eye* (7)
5 Codicils, one with date written by bum lawyer on the outside (7)
9 What Labour want: to stagger on, etc. pathetically with no one doing a U-turn (2-8)
11 Dismiss French novelist pushing out pair (4)
12 Mo turns and leaves US movie star – that's gratitude for you! (6)
13 Play the Queen at "PM I dismissed" in prize environment (4,2,2)
14/7 Madonna tried to lie about being pissed (5,3,9)
16 Bollocks act amazingly when given a twirl (4)
18 Prescott: firstly an arse, then "tosser" (4)
20 Bill: Blair ultimately involved in crucial cock-up (8)
23 Posh's quality enrolled nurse comes between the unhappy couple (8)
24 Swear Spielberg film with implausible ending is rather feeble (6)
26 Too political, sovereign's contribution (4)
27 Let-down Northern relative cried out with orgasm (10)
28 For each female DIY fiasco there's an act of infidelity (7)
29 "Fairies", according to hawks securing Iran without one (7)

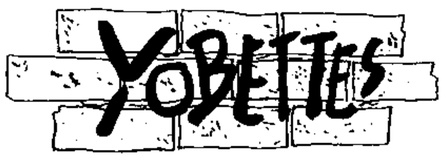
DOWN

2 Hip and seat switched – and nuts (7)
3 Only deviously securing Brown's end is material (5)
4 Fall from grace, Labour's leader must go, the arse! (8)
6 Casual habit of Di's, getting involved with men (6)
7 See 14ac.
8 Lives over German surrounded by Polish loathing (7)
10 Unintentionally responsible for a leak about Northern Ireland uniting with America, say? (11)
15 Go quickly through conductor Dicky (6,3)
17 Shag and peak with bottle-top (5,3)
19 Finally, Mr Bean needs to swallow stimulant to beat off (7)
21 Tony Blair's limits apparent in answer: "Issue a disclaimer!" (7)
22 Ready to show where the wanker came? (2,4)
25 One who got a blast from the chair, reportedly, brother (5)

Crossword 329 winner: HOWARD & LINDA BONGERS

ACROSS: 13 Lionel Blair 14 Smoothie 15 Apollo 17 Throng 18 Worry 19 Deep South 20/70 Kiss me Hardy 21 Keep in suspense 22 Batty 23 Tipple 25 Captain 28 Stay 29 Btu 30 Error 31 Bono 33 Skin deep 34/54 Boris Yeltsin 36 Harem 37 Kidnap 38 Anne 39 Lucre 42 Gemma 44 Rectum 47 Arrest 49 Turn on 50 Expose 53 Dyke 55 Throb 56 Likud 57 Noser 59 Milk 60 Pledge 61 Lynam 63 Lyric 64 Emissary 65 I say 66 Motto 68/7 Knob joke 69 Chaucer 71 Snatch 73 Oscar 74 South Sea Bubble 77/43 Chat room 79 Costumier 81/40 Delta Force 82 Titans 83 Intern 84 Iron Lady 85 Hand-to-mouth.

DOWN: 1 Lichee 2 Incompetence 3 Slogan 4 Blowgun 5 Disreputable 6 Smudge 8 Chase the dragon 9 Deputy Prime Minister 10 Catheter 11 Cock-up 12 Alms 16 Sydney 22 Brush 24 Long ago 26 Askance 27 Ideal 29 Bistro 31 Bad trip 32 Special Relationship 35 Refusal 37 Keane 41 Ecuador 45 Tuesday 46 Metre 48 Robinson Crusoe 51 Splurge 52 Skylab 57 Necrophiliac 58 Reith 59 Masturbation 62 Major 66 Mohicans 68 Kaunda 72 Titles 74 Shreds 75 Bottom 76 Length 78/67 Hand job 80 Idle.



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The Cabinet has decided a White Paper setting out its position to renew the Trident and promised a three month consultation period before a Commons debate and vote.

The Prime Minister has said he intends to announce early the means of consultation. He must decide what this will mean and how it can carry out to a meaningful national debate.

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John Reid, then Defence Secretary, September 2005

"We will announce the means of consultation when we publish the White Paper. Of course, we believe it is extremely important to have the fullest possible debate on the subject."
Tony Blair, PMQs, 28 June 2006

"The debate about that shouldn't be confined to a couple of cabinet ministers. It should involve the party, it should involve the movement, it should involve people in civil society and the wider public who have got something to contribute."
Peter Hain, Labour Party Conference, September 2006

...AND NOW

"Rather than endlessly sidetracking ourselves into questions of process, we should just come to a judgment."
Tony Blair, House of Commons, 4 December 2006

"Consultations happen after a Green Paper – this is a White Paper – just contact your MP. "
Ministry of Defence, 5 December 2006

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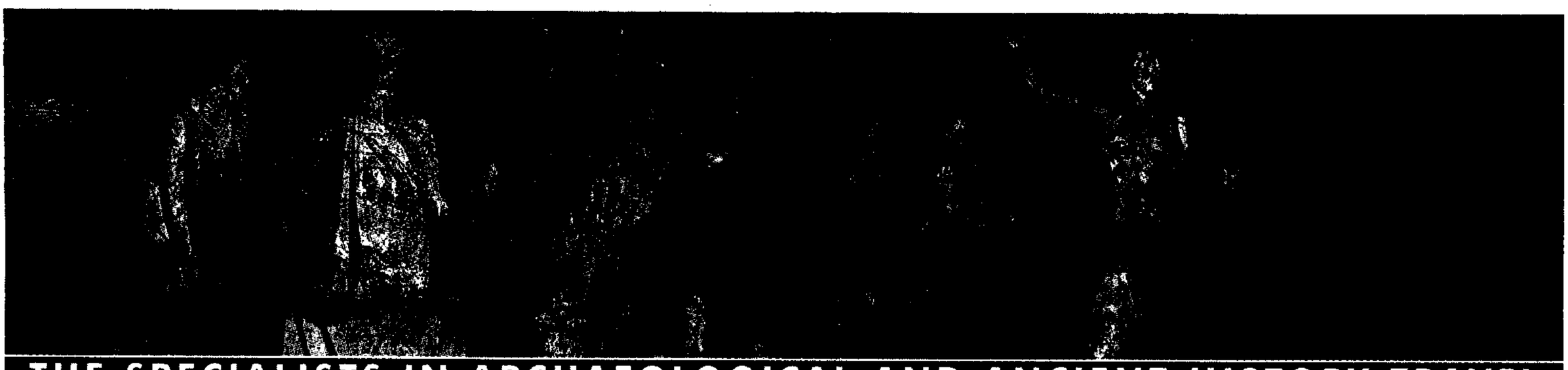

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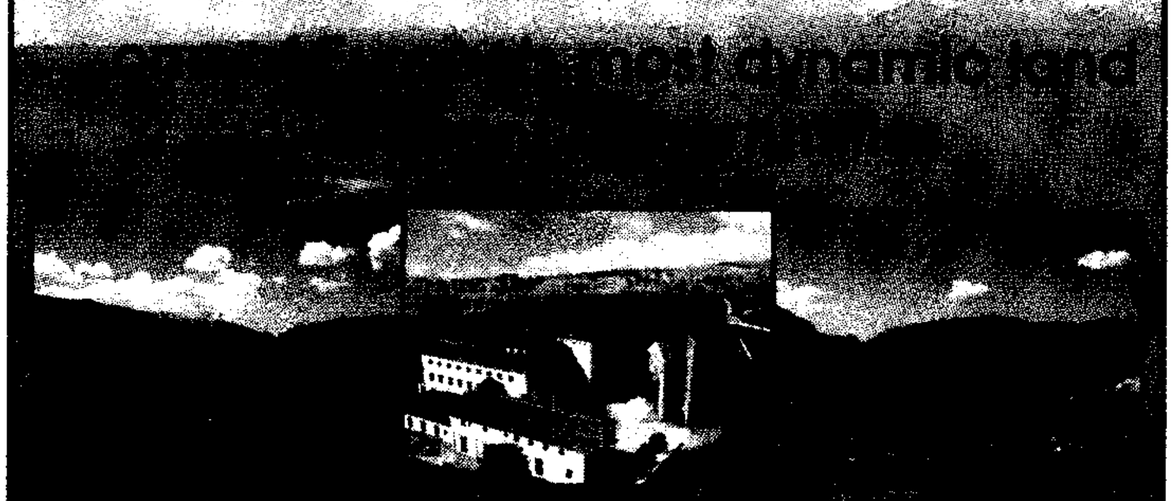

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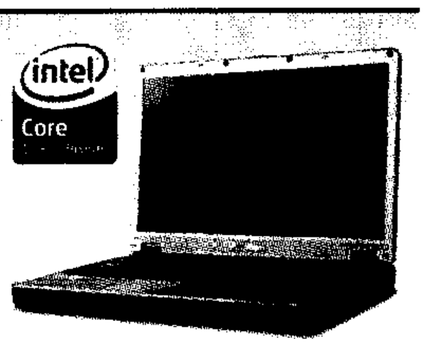

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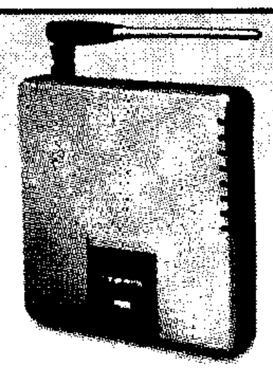

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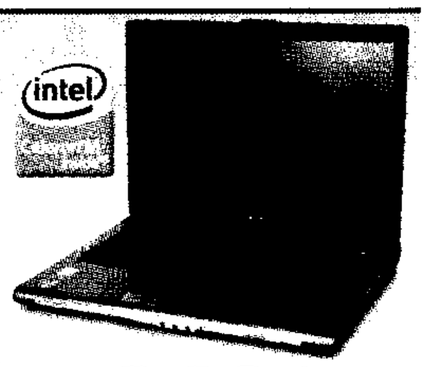

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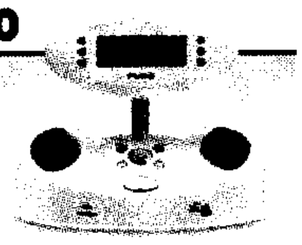

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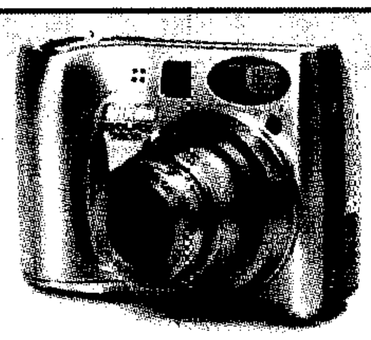

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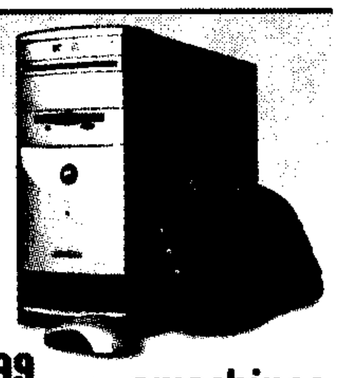

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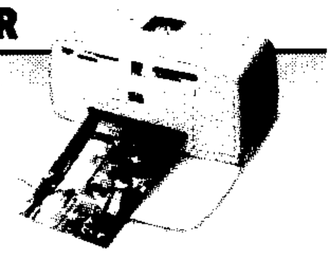

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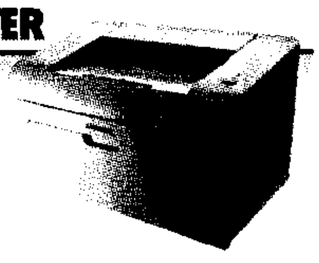

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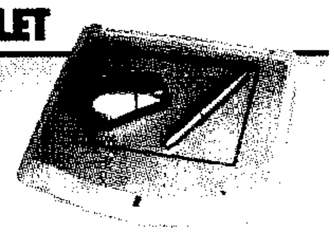

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PLEASE HELP US give our 16-year-old daughter with M.E. some privacy and dignity and our other children their sanity back. RBS, S/C: 16-21-13. A/C: 11188268.

REDUNDANT! Difficulty providing Christmas and New Year for supportive wife and family. Help! Nationwide, S/C: 07-00-30. A/C: 59735253.

SPONSORSHIP for independent short film: 'Dark Hearts'. Anything helps. LloydsTSB, S/C: 77-56-02. A/C: 13915660. Thank you.

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DESPERATE SINGLE MOTHER working but struggling. Need help with debt of £25K. Halifax, S/C: 11-03-37. A/C: 00157500.

SINGLE MUM TEACHER, ex-partner unemployed ceased child maintenance £375 monthly – help appreciated. S/C: 40-47-75. A/C: 72224089.

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DISABLED MAN needs new wheelchair. Many thanks. S/C: 40-47-80. A/C: 90964875.

DESPERATE MOTHER, £35,000 loans. Please help without me degrading myself. First Direct, S/C: 40-47-86. A/C: 24190831. Reply to Box 186003 for details of loan papers.

DAMSEL IN DISTRESS, entirely own fault, seeks white knight with black Amex card. S/C: 30-97-06. A/C: 00542066.

LADY IN DISTRESS: Three daughters and debt collectors knocking. Need a Christmas for my kids. Anything appreciated. May you be rewarded 1,000 times. S/C: 11-10-31. A/C: 00228878.

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ANY CASH NEEDED to help business failure, please help. Thank you. NatWest, S/C: 56-00-29. A/C: 26116588.

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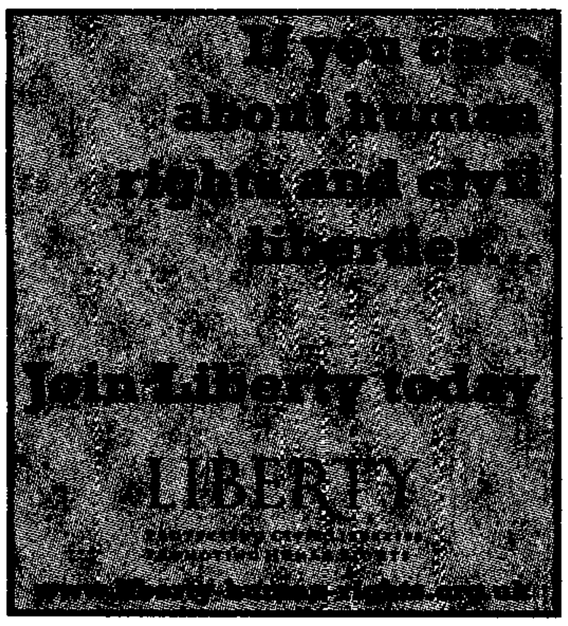

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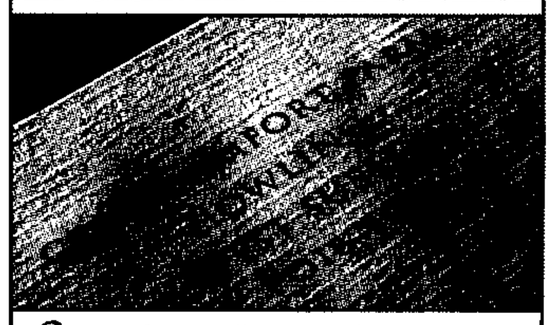

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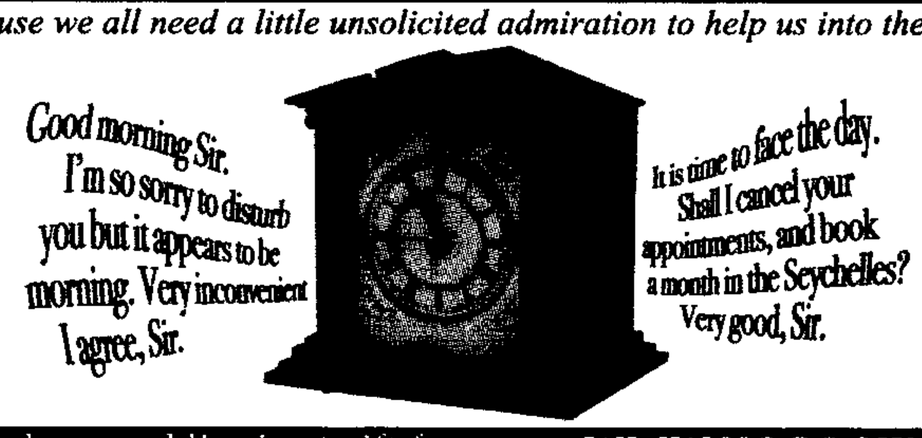
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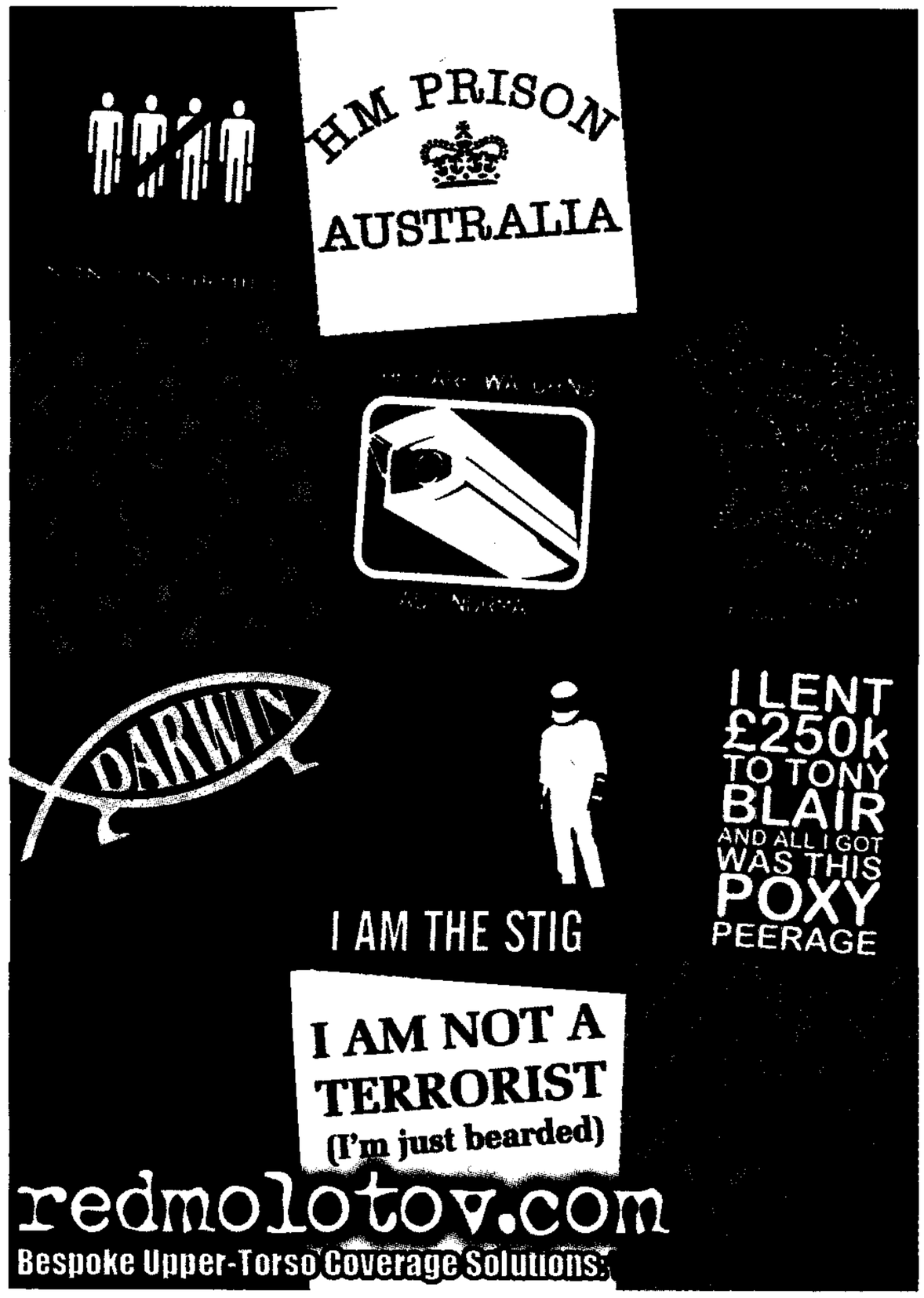

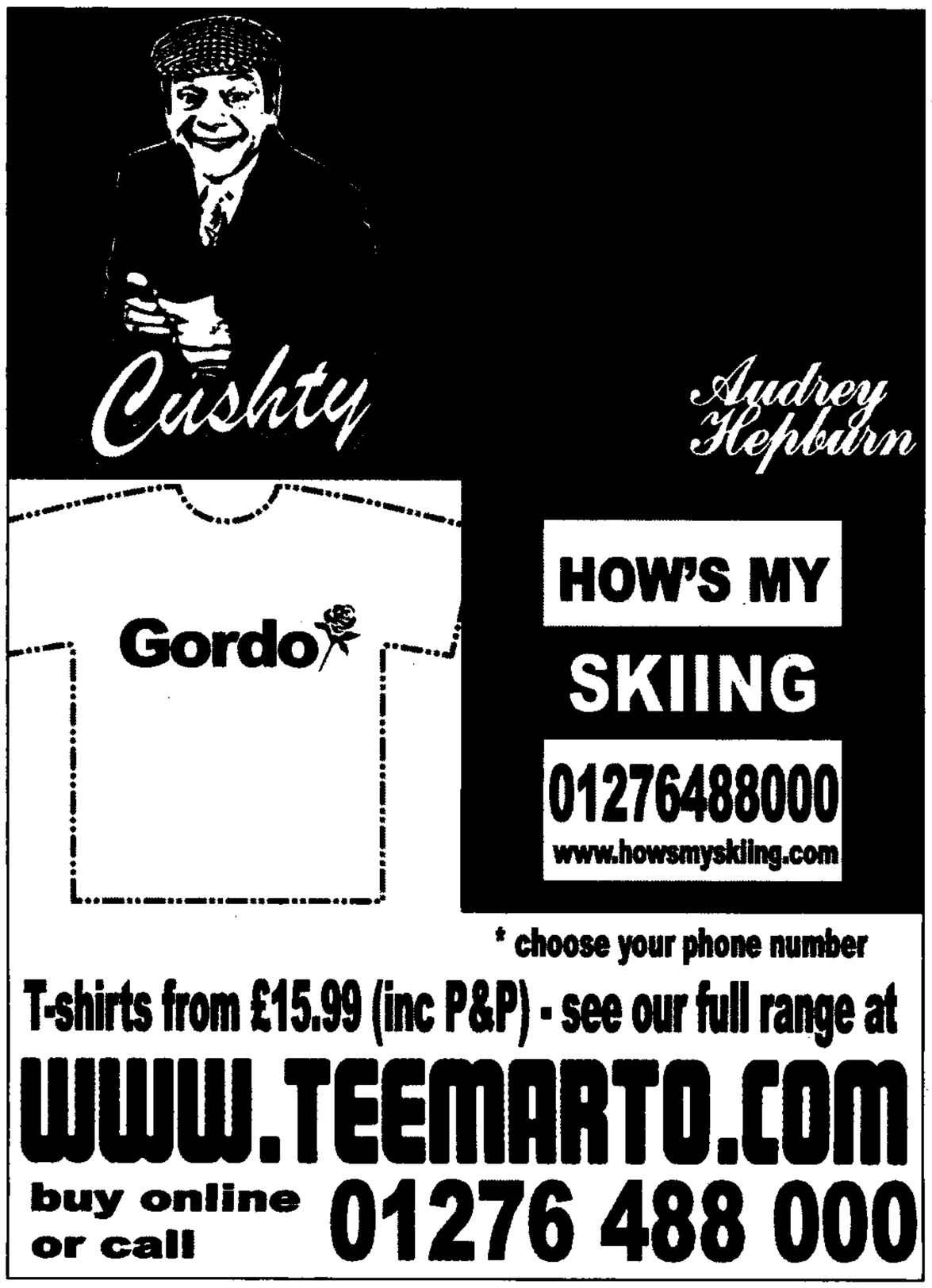

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